

Entrapment and Enchantment:
Nympholepsy and the Cult of the Girl Child

by

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Abstract

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Focusing on Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955), Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* (1886), J. M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* (1911), Henry Darger's *The Story of the Vivian Girls, in what is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinian War Storm, Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion*, and John Ashbery's *Girls on the Run* (1999), this dissertation investigates how the Victorian cult of the girl child may have its roots in another Victorian interest, ancient Greek culture. While this dissertation adds to the scholarship on literary pedophilia, it makes a distinction between the pedophile and the nympholept. Whereas the pedophile wishes to sexually possess children, the nympholept does not necessarily wish to sexually possess his nymph; rather, the nympholept is moved to create art inspired by his nymph, or girl child. This dissertation introduces the idea of sublimation into art to the discourse of girl children. Just as classical nymphs had to sublimate themselves into landscapes in order to escape their male pursuers, we see how the girl children in this study are sublimated into literary or visual art in order metaphorically to preserve themselves. While forging a connection between the cult of the girl child to nympholepsy, this study also connects nympholepsy to what Bruno Bettelheim in *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976) calls "enchantment," that is, using fantastical stories in order to navigate certain unknowns, mainly adulthood and death. This

dissertation takes this a step further and asserts that nympholepts used enchantment as a means to entrap nymphs. While bringing up the inevitable charge of pedophilia, this project is not interested in the pedophile but in the nympholept and the means through which he sublimates a girl child into visual or literary art. The opening chapter examines *Lolita* alongside the taxonomy for classical Greek nymphs and explores both the minutia and larger themes in *Lolita* that relate to this classification. Chapter two examines Carroll's relationship to Alice Liddell in light of nympholepsy and the triangulation of pleasure between Carroll, Alice, and *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*, which the chapter recognizes as a highly eroticized fetish object. Chapter three studies the subversive sexuality and desires of Wendy Darling while arguing that Peter Pan, instead of being a little boy who refuses to grow up, is a Pan figure. The final chapter discusses how nympholepsy plays out in the art and writings of Darger and Ashbery's nympholepsy. The dissertation concludes with a creative epilogue that explores the theme of "reenchantment" that I discuss in chapter four.

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Introduction

In Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, Humbert Humbert describes himself as a monster, realizing that his pedophilic desires, which are considered criminal and contemptible to the society in which he lives, demonize and savage his inner self. In its early reception, *Lolita* was dubbed as filthy and considered pornographic while simultaneously enjoying the status of a best-seller. As contemptible as Humbert may seem to many readers, *Lolita* continues to both fascinate and repel. Like Lewis Carroll's nude portrait of Evelyn Hatch, we find ourselves unable to resist looking away while simultaneously realizing that what we are witnessing is something from which society stipulates we avert our gaze. Such repulsions and attractions still operate to entertain in contemporary society. One of prime-time television's most popular shows, *To Catch a Predator*, features reality sting operations in which real-life pedophiles are turned into prey themselves as they are unknowingly filmed in the very act of attempting to meet with children while local law enforcement wait for the show's host to humiliate and interrogate them before sweeping in. Viewers can voyeuristically watch "child predators" not only in the act of trying to prey on children but also learn about the very means through which these "monsters" entrap children.

Like *Lolita*, the pedophile is charged with entertainment value: the monster both repels and attracts. While watching the show one night, I realized that viewers were being enticed to watch another pedophilic delight: one of The Learning Channel's (TLC) most popular shows, *Toddlers in Tiaras*, which features very young and sometimes pouting or hysterically bawling beauty pageant contestants in rather adult-like costumes and dance numbers, was airing commercials, creating a seemingly disturbing but all too

common triangulation of pedophile, child, and cultural desire. Such an occurrence would perhaps delight James R. Kincaid who, in *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture*, posits that society not only creates but also demands the pedophile in the same way that we (and Kincaid is highly adamant about his use of “we” in his thesis) demand and create the child in order to perpetuate a myth involving innocence and purity.

I bring up the pedophile now, within the opening paragraphs of this study, because it is what the reader expects and is accustomed to finding in studies on girl children, especially those studies that also center on the males that hover over them. I bring up the pedophile now because it is he rather than a child who will go missing in these pages. The reader will find very little discussion about the pedophile but instead will find meditation on the nympholept. By effacing the pedophile and introducing the nympholept, I realize that I am causing what might be considered a rather controversial upheaval of established norms. For one, by calling the entrapping males nympholepts rather than pedophiles, I risk accusations of absolving the crime of pedophilia by suggesting that it springs from noble, mythical, or poetical beginnings. While pedophilic discourse is certainly of interest and important when dealing with literature that centers on relations between the girl child and the men who wish to possess them, this study makes a departure from that discourse. Instead, this project aims to investigate how the Victorian cult of the girl child may have its roots in another Victorian interest, ancient Greek culture.

In his essay “The Last Lover: Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*” Lionel Trilling writes that the use of the word “nymphet” in *Lolita* has “probably nothing” (Bloom 10) to do

with classical Greek nymphs. I felt a challenge, and my project found its seed. When I read Trilling's essay, I had just taken a course in reading and writing ancient Greek and was interested in ancient Greek culture, so Trilling's challenge was a welcome venue through which I could focus my interests. Although I have interspersed the definitions and provide gentle reminders along the way, the reader may find it easier before proceeding to navigate these chapters with some understanding of how the ancient Greek *numphê* and the nympholept were viewed in ancient Greece. Researching the topic of the ancient Greek nymph turns up mere smidgens of text within larger contextual studies; however, there exists one book solely devoted to the topic. In *Greek Nymphs: Myth, Cult, Lore*, Jennifer Larson provides what she considers to be a taxonomy of nymphs and also discusses how the term *numphê* took on multiple meanings in ancient Greek culture: the term "can refer not only to the minor female divinities of the wild places but also to any nubile woman or, more commonly, a bride" (Larson 3). Larson provides further criteria for nymphs including parentage by a God, association with mortality and a death narrative, ambiguity, failure to fully domesticate, potential to be sexually aggressive, possessing an association with a water source as well as their own cult setting such as a cave or river, and serving in cultic functions and in special functions to the Gods. None of these criteria, however, quite mesh with what a contemporary reader may find if she were to search the Internet for nymphets, a search which turns up pornographic websites claiming underage or "barely legal" girls.

Humbert Humbert refers to nympholepsy as "the most ancient of all crimes and pastimes" (*Lolita* 168), and in ancient Greek culture, to be struck with nympholepsy meant that one suffered a creative drive inspired by a nymph. *Lolita*, Humbert says, has

“individualized the writer’s ancient lust,” which is nympholepsy. Furthermore, Larson writes, “it is this form of nympholepsy to which Sokrates alludes when he playfully announces that he is on the verge of speaking in dithyrambs under the influence of the nymphs of Ilissos. In such contexts, poetry and prophecy, always closely related, cannot be separated, and the nympholept, like the poet, the Sibyl . . . experiences a state of divine madness” (Larson 13). Nympholepsy then is not merely a “divine madness,” but it is a seizure that moves the “susceptible individual” to create poetry and prophecy as well as to produce eloquent and artful speech and writing. This is where I make a distinction between the pedophile and the nympholept: whereas the pedophile wishes to sexually possess children, the nympholept does not necessarily wish to sexually possess his nymph, but he certainly is moved to create art because of his nymph. My project also aims to introduce the idea of sublimation into art in the discourse of girl children. Just as classical nymphs had to sublimate themselves into landscapes in order to escape their male pursuers, we see how the girl children in my study are sublimated into literary or visual art in order metaphorically to preserve themselves.

My study focuses on five nympholepts: Vladimir Nabokov’s Humbert Humbert, Lewis Carroll, J. M. Barrie’s Peter Pan, the outsider artist Henry Darger, and John Ashbery. I realize that this grouping may seem odd and disparate, but I chose to focus on these nympholepts, without constraining my study to a singular art or time period, because these nympholepts were possessed by girl children who also possessed me in some way. Moved by what Humbert might call the “magic of nymphets” (*Lolita* 134), I became fascinated with Lolita, Alice Liddell as well as the fictional Alice, Wendy Darling, and Darger’s army of girl child slaves. Again, I wish to stress that possession is not

always, as this study illustrates, a sexual one, and my being moved to write on these girl children has nothing to do with a sexual impetus. Rather it might have more to do with what U. C. Knoepfelmacher in *Ventures into Childland: Victorians, Fairy Tales, and Femininity* describes as recovering a female imagination (Knoepfelmacher 9). Of course, this is not the case for all nympholepts. Humbert Humbert wishes to sexually possess Lolita, but he is also possessed by her to write. He writes pages and pages of journal entries as well as his confession of exquisite prose that becomes *Lolita*. Although there is no concrete evidence that Lewis Carroll wished to sexually possess Alice Liddell, she certainly inspired Carroll to make both visual and literary art. In *Peter and Wendy*, we see how the girl child Wendy inspires Peter, the little Pan, to invent adventures or stories for the children to play and live in. Henry Darger was possessed by the images of girl children found in the pop culture of his day, and his visual art is full of girls from cartoons and advertisements. His work is so enchanting that Ashbery was taken to nympholepsy himself and moved to write a book-length poem on Darger's Girls.

My study, while aiming to forge a connection between the cult of the girl child to nympholepsy, also aims to connect nympholepsy to what Bruno Bettelheim in *The Uses of Enchantment* calls "enchantment," that is, using stories, particularly fantastical stories, in order to navigate certain unknowns, mainly adulthood and death. Wendy Darling, for example, uses enchantment—that is, tells herself stories about her relationship with Peter—in order to navigate the unknowns of being a woman, mother, and wife as well as the unknowns of love and heartbreak. While I originally read Bettelheim's text in order to study fairy tales in a more scholarly light, I began to see how enchantment further worked for the subjects in my study. Enchantment was also used as a means to entrap.

We see this play out most noticeably in Lewis Carroll, who used enchantment to keep his child subjects entertained while he photographed them. By telling stories, illustrating, and inventing role-play for his photographic subjects, Carroll became one of the most famous child photographers of his day. Furthermore, Carroll was able to entrap the Liddell children in a boat by enchanting them with the story that would become *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Humbert Humbert enchants himself: he sees himself as Pan and girl children as nymphs, thereby convincing himself of the normalcy and acceptability of his pedophilic desires. Darger, who worked on his 15,000 page novel *The Story of the Vivian Girls, in what is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinian War Storm, Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion* for most of his life, toiled deeply within enchantment to navigate the unknowns of solitude and loneliness.

While there are no scholarly works written directly on this subject, there exists a number of books that address certain topics that are important in furthering my own argument. I realize that my project pushes ahead in exploring its own peculiar and somewhat uncharted obsession with nympholepsy and entrapment, and I hope that the reader will see my argument as another layer to add to the speculations about not merely girl-lovers, but girl-lovers who sublimate their beloveds into art. Again, my project, while bringing up the inevitable charge of pedophilia, is interested not in the pedophile but in the nympholept and the means through which he sublimate a girl child into visual or literary art. While dealing with the topic of girl children and the men who immortalized them in books, painting, or photographs, no scholar or critic can skirt the issue of pedophilia; therefore, while the texts below may focus on pedophilia from time to time, none make it the sole focus of investigation.

In *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* Kincaid argues that as long as we continue to posit that the child is innocent and pure there will be pedophiles to threaten this perceived purity. For Kincaid, the innocent child and the pedophile exist alongside one another, and both are creations of a society that longs for the innocence of children. In essence, the pedophile does not exist outside of our vision of an innocent child, and neither does the innocent child exist outside of our longing for an innocent child. We create and reject the pedophile simultaneously. He writes:

The argument is that what we think of as “the child” has been assembled in reference to desire, built up in erotic manufactories, and that we have been laboring ever since, for at least two centuries, both to deny that horrible and lovely product and to maintain it...By insisting so loudly on the innocence, purity, and asexuality of the child, we have created a subversive echo: experience, corruption, eroticism. More than that, by attributing to the child the central features of desirability in our culture—purity, innocence, emptiness, Otherness—we have made absolutely essential figures who would enact this desire. (Kincaid 4-5)

For Kincaid, it is the pedophile that we create to “enact this desire.” Kincaid puts forth the rather controversial argument that because we want the idea of the child, we “sacrifice the bodies of children” for this idea (Kincaid 6). Furthermore, for Kincaid, because the division between child and adult seems to be based on sexual knowledge, the relationship between child and adult is therefore erotic.

In *Ventures into Childland: Victorians, Fairy Tales, and Femininity*, U. C.

Knoepfmacher examines the work of four male writers—John Ruskin, William Makepeace Thackeray, George MacDonald, and Lewis Carroll—and asserts that these men particularly enjoyed the company of girl children due to an arrested development that occurred in the nursery. He argues:

...all four writers created constructions of childhood that were shaped by their common longing for a lost feminine complement. That longing, prompted by personal circumstances as well as by the special conditions under which nineteenth-century boys were raised, was embodied in the fantasies and fairy tales these men created and was reflected in their choice of young girls as their prime auditors and readers. (Knoepfmacher xi)

The “special conditions” that these writers as well as other boys during this time included what Knoepfmacher sees as their abrupt and premature removal from the nursery. Instead of being allowed to continue an asexual childhood with their female counterparts, boys, at a certain age (usually around five or six), were taken out of the family nursery, an event that marked their passage into a world of sexual division as well as an eradication of purity and fantasy. Therefore, to recover their childhood meant to recover their femininity as well, and because their development was halted by their abrupt removal from an androgynous nursery, these men aimed to recover their childhoods through story, where they could venture into childhood, as it were.

According to Knoepfelmacher, these stories are, by nature, anti-adult and display a “regressive hostility to growth and sexual division” (Knoepfelmacher 5). Adults in these tales are cruel, and the girl child, at the center of these tales during the Victorian era, stands in for a return to the nursery and a recovery of the female imagination.

In *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman* Catherine Robson contends that the Victorian cult of the girl child stems from and should not be examined without considering the Victorian myth that, in order to mature into full-grown, masculine beings, men had to undergo an “initial feminine stage” (Robson 3). Robson sees her argument as a challenge to “narratives of pedophilic desire” that have come to dominate the criticism surrounding these girl-lovers. She notes that the girl child, in the works of these men, is celebrated at the cost of the grown and mature female. Like Knoepfelmacher, Robson notes that Victorian boys were wrestled from the feminine nursery not only to be schooled or tutored but to dress their part as little men. In the nursery, notes Robson, little boys and girls wore similar clothing, clothing that would be considered feminine today. The nursery, argues Robson, is quintessentially feminine, as is childhood. Robson furthers her thesis by asserting that although the stories of this era centered on a girl child, the stories “lament a man’s lost girlhood” (Robson 5).

Photographing girl children is the subject of Carol Mavor’s *Pleasures Taken: Performances of Sexuality and Loss in Victorian Photographs*, in which she examines the photographs of Lewis Carroll, Julia Margaret Cameron, and Hannah Cullwick and argues that the photographs of children present a triangulation of pleasure among the child, the photographer, and the viewer. This pleasure is primarily due to what Mavor sees as a child’s complex sexuality, one that she contends “deserves recognition, respect, and

scrutiny” (*Pleasures* 1). Mavor notes that the Victorians commodified childhood while simultaneously shunning this commodification and as a result turned towards the past and childhood as a “time and place that never was” (Mavor 2-3). She argues that like Victorians, contemporary culture has “continued the tradition of infantilizing history by recharming our past” (Mavor 3). Additionally, Mavor makes a connection between the commodity of photographs and childhood by relating their cultural formation:

“photography was invented hand-in-hand with our modern conception of childhood. The child and the photograph were commodified, fetishized, developed alongside each other: they were laminated and framed as one” (Mavor 3). For Mavor, not only did photography work to preserve images, it also worked to preserve childhood itself, as it could “keep time still, innocent, untouched” (Mavor 3). Within that seeming innocence, however, existed a display of sexuality and pleasures.

My opening chapter “of tender dreamy childishness and a kind of eerie vulgarity”: The Uses of Enchantment, Entrapment, and the Classical Nymph in Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*” aims to challenge Trilling’s contention that *Lolita* probably has nothing to do with actual nymphs. To this end, I examine *Lolita* alongside Larson’s taxonomy for classical Greek nymphs, exploring both the minutia and larger themes in the novel. The chapter outlines how *Lolita*, like traditional nymphs, changes shape or, like a nymph, metamorphoses throughout the novel and becomes difficult for Humbert to capture or pin down. *Lolita* enters into various roles in the book, and Humbert, who uses enchantment in order to convince himself that he was fated to violate *Lolita*, also changes roles as well. I discuss how *Lolita* bridges the gap between the Victorian cult of the girl child and the modern novel and how the nympholept Humbert Humbert

attempts to recreate Lolita through memory and artifice, ultimately sublimating her within the literary landscape of his novel-confession. Whimsical and critical by turns, the chapter itself mimics the fluttering Lolita by following its own digressions and obsessions.

My second chapter, “Adventures in *Under Ground* Deviancies: Role-play and Fetishes in Lewis-Carroll-Carroll Land,” examines Lewis Carroll’s relationship to Alice Liddell in light of nympholepsy and focuses on his photographs and the prototype to his *Alice* books, *Alice’s Adventures Under Ground*. Just as Mavor argues that there is a triangulation of pleasure between viewer, photographer, and photographic subject, I argue that there is a triangulation of pleasure between Carroll, Alice, and *Alice’s Adventures Under Ground*, which I contend is a highly eroticized fetish object. I also explore what I see as Carroll’s podophilia, which only centered on little girl feet. Mavor argues that critics shy away from discussing Carroll’s photographs, especially his nude photographs. I wanted to add to the small amount of scholarship on Carroll’s girl photographs by exploring a number in detail through the lens of nympholepsy and what I perceive to be Carroll’s own fetishes. Additionally, I study how Carroll used various enchantments—stories, novels, role-playing, photographs, illustrations, and letters—in order to entrap his nymphs and to further his enchanting art of writing and photography.

My third chapter, “‘not merely because of the unknown that was stalking toward them’: The Performance and Play of Sexuality, Growing Older, and Death in J.M. Barrie’s *Peter and Wendy*,” examines what I see as the subversive sexuality and desires of Wendy Darling while arguing that Peter Pan, instead of being a little boy who refuses to grow up, is a Pan figure. As such, Peter is more akin to the lusty old goat Pan than he is

to a little boy, and like Pan, Peter, of course, pursues nymphs. He has a preference, however, for the little girls in Mrs. Darling's progeny. We see how the seemingly proper middle-class Wendy uses enchantment to navigate the unknowns of being a grown-up woman. Through play with Peter that passes into perversion, Wendy comes into premature contact with sexuality, violence, and death in Neverland. Although Kincaid would like to think of Wendy and Peter's play as being inconsequential (Kincaid 283), I argue that their play has dire consequences for Wendy's development. Hook and the Lost Boys also treat Wendy according to special rules, and her relationships to these males are also studied. I also examine Peter's relationship to other girl children as well as the other females on the island: Tinker Bell, the mermaids, and Tiger Lily. This chapter makes use of several works that Barrie wrote on Peter Pan, including *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* and the play *Peter Pan*.

My final chapter, "Between the impossible alternatives of existing' or Nympholepsy Twice-removed: Henry Darger's Uses of 'Reenchantment' and the Poetics of Appropriation in John Ashbery's *Girls on the Run*," discusses how nympholepsy plays out in the art and writings of Darger, and how Ashbery, inspired by Darger's *Girls*, writes *Girls on the Run*, a long ekphrasis imagining the toils and trials of the Darger's *Girls*; Ashbery has nympholepsy twice-removed. I examine how Darger's *Girls* fit into the category of the nymph as well as Victorian representation of girl children. Building off of "enchantment," I outline what I see as "reenchantment," or Darger's method of rescuing girl children from garbage and giving them new, reinvented lives in his literary and visual art. The chapter ends with a discussion of the poetics of appropriation, how both Darger's and Ashbery's work figure into what Brian McHale in his essay

“POSTcyberMODERNpunkISM” calls cyberpunk. The chapter concludes with a close reading of Ashbery’s poem, examining it through the lens of nympholepsy, and drawing correlations between it and Darger’s work.

Finally, my project culminates in a creative epilogue, “not merely because of the unknown that was stalking toward them,” a dark reimagining of Barrie’s *Peter and Wendy*. Just as Ashbery suffered from what I call nympholepsy twice removed, I too was struck by this type of nympholepsy and wanted to “reenchant” the novel. When reading *Peter and Wendy*, I spent equal time heightening the text’s inherent sexuality and violence and heightening its sinister qualities, especially its treatment of death. Just as Ashbery was taken by Darger’s girls and inspired to write *Girls on the Run*, I was similarly drawn in by Wendy Darling and moved to write this creative work. (This piece was published as a single-volume multi-genre book by Tarpaulin Sky Press in June 2011.) The work can be seen as the creative outgrowth of my critical chapter on *Peter and Wendy*. As in Ashbery’s poem, my work exhibits the tendencies of recycling, borrowing, and lifting that McHale attributes to postmodern literature. Additionally, I feel as if my work moves further into postmodernism by exhibiting a tendency towards genre collapse. Part fiction and poetry, the piece is also the culmination of my research on Barrie and Peter Pan. While my epilogue’s inception was critical, as a nympholept myself, my urge was to create literary art and further sublimate the girl Wendy into my own imagined creative literary landscape. Like all nymph narratives, my piece also exhibits a death narrative, which I have tried to explore in the “Home Under the Ground” sections on each page. These underground sections are meant to symbolize a literal home under ground but also a metaphorical burial place. It is this tension, between the lively girl child and her already

dead self (long since sublimated into art), that I hope the reader will enjoy unraveling and puzzling over in these pages.

Chapter One

“of tender dreamy childishness and a kind of eerie vulgarity”:

The Uses of Enchantment, Entrapment, and the Classical Nymph

in Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*

The principal works in my study focus on four nympholepts—Humbert Humbert, Lewis Carroll, Peter Pan, and Henry Darger—who use enchantment as a means to entrap girl children, or nymphs, and sublimate these girl children into literary and visual art. In the case of Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*, Humbert’s solipsism is so pronounced that he is, at times, able to convince himself of the sanity and sanctity of his nympholeptic impulses by imagining himself to be Pan while also imagining certain bewitching girl children to be frolicking nymphs. Humbert, adding to this enchantment, tells himself the story of McFate, convincing himself that McFate alone is responsible for the outcomes of his actions. Rather than present my nympholepts to the reader in chronological order, I will begin with Nabokov’s *Lolita*, as much of the groundwork for my investigations, particularly Jennifer Larson’s seminal work on classical Greek nymphs in *Greek Nymphs: Myth, Cult, Lore*, are defined and explicated. Additionally, while the reader may take for granted Humbert’s enchantment by seeing his Lolita as his “nymphet,” unless one is versed in the classical Greek nymph, especially how the figure was understood in ancient Greek culture, the reader may overlook the many allusions that Nabokov—knowingly or not—makes use of in the novel. While there is much criticism on *Lolita* as a “nymphet”—that is, as a nubile girl in bobby-socks—there has not been a study on how Lolita meets the criteria as a “nymph” in the classical sense. This chapter, therefore, aims to bring attention to the very real connection that I see

between Lolita and ancient Greek nymphs while also providing a different lens through which to read not only Humbert's solipsism, but also Lolita's fate, entrapped in *Lolita*.

My project is prompted in large part by a passage in Lionel Trilling's essay "The Last Lover: Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*." Trilling argues:

Mr. Nabokov is, among his other accomplishments, an eminent entomologist and I shall leave it to some really rigorous close reader of fiction to tell us what an entomological novelist wants us to do with the fact that *nymph* is the name for the young of an insect without complete metamorphosis. Probably nothing. But he is also a scholar of languages and he knows that *nymph* is the Greek word for *bride*. (Bloom 10)

I do not claim to be the "really rigorous close reader of fiction" that Trilling suggests could unlock the entomological mystery concerning the use of "nymph" in *Lolita*; however, the more I investigated the classical "nymph," the more it seemed to me that both of these categories—entomological and etymological—are important in understanding Lolita, not as the demonic seductress in bobby socks that many critics, following Humbert Humbert, have been quick to pin her, but rather as the unattainable, ambiguous nymph of Humbert's imagination that resides within both the sacred and the profane. First I will relate how Lolita fulfills the categories of "nymph," because these categories demonstrate how entrapment and enchantment work in the recreating or immortalizing of Lolita into *Lolita*. Lolita is, in many ways, the embodiment of the Greek *numphé* as well as "the young of an insect without complete metamorphosis." By

looking to both the entomological and etymological sources of the nymph, we see how Lolita, through Humbert's solipsism and use of enchantment, fulfills these categories; Lolita, like the classical nymphs Daphne, Syrinx, and Echo, is granted immortality only through sublimation, succumbing to the mortality and death narrative, which is inherent in these classical nymph narratives.

Nabokov employs a multitude of tropes to display Lolita's nymph-like ability to transform; these tropes include memory, myth, cinema, writing, and the failures, fleetingness, and impermanency of these representations. While the fictional Alice finds herself in situations and places that are forever shifting, forever changing, Lolita, as many nymphs in the classical tradition, is what shifts, changes. She flutters as madly and unpredictably as one of Nabokov's prized and rare butterflies—unattainable, highly coveted, as shifty as projected movie film. However she may metamorphose and change, Humbert reminds us that “in [his] arms she was always Lolita” (*Lolita* 9). Lolita—part butterfly larva, part cinematic image, part nymph—is always fluttering, transforming, and threatening metamorphosis and escape. Humbert says that Lolita is a “starlet,” and we see her enter various roles. This shifting, although meshed in the cinematic notions of illusion and impermeability that run through the novel, also has its impetus in the nymph figure, which is unattainable, fleeting, transformative, and, through metamorphosis, illusory.

Lolita bridges the gap between the Victorian cult of the girl child and the modern novel, displaying both its allegiance to classical Greek but also its rejection of strict adherence to classical notions of love and beauty, often preferring vulgarity and lust. As an outgrowth of what Nina Auerbach describes in *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a*

Victorian Myth as the “essentially mythic” imagination of Victorian culture (Auerbach 1), in which women’s sexuality was often associated with transformative and ambiguous creatures, *Lolita* also serves as a bridge between the modern novel and the ideas of such beastly and frightening notions of transfiguration that Auerbach describes as a woman’s “mutilated power” (Auerbach 8). Lolita, because she is a shifting and transformative being, at least through Humbert’s enchantment, fulfills the categories of the ancient Greek nymph (both mythical and cultural), yet is also made more ambiguous and complicated by her status as child, which James Kincaid in *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture*, argues is just as shifty a category, comprised of societal projections with an erotic base that separates child and adult (Kincaid 7). The category of child further mutilates Lolita’s power, as it were, making it more difficult to pin her down and classify her. Although Humbert most often describes Lolita as a nymphet, he also refers to her as a ghost, a rose, a mermaid, an echo, a starlet, a vulgar American teenager, and a demon, among other things. She, like the women in Auerbach’s study, is a chimera, seen as prismatic and fragmented in Humbert’s eyes. She is rarely a whole child, rarely Dolores Haze, but more often just the fragmented “Lo.”

I am interested in how *Lolita* functions as a traditional nymph narrative and accordingly, how her status as “nymph” makes possible a novel that deals with both preservation and entrapment of its nymphet, specifically through literary and cinematic tropes as well as the use of enchantment in its protagonist. By enchantment here, and throughout my project, I use Bruno Bettelheim’s meaning of the term in *The Uses of Enchantment*—that is, using fairy tale or myth in order to navigate unknown situations. In Humbert’s case, he uses enchantment, or tells himself stories, in order to navigate and

even justify his pedophilic desires. Nymphs, like Lo, are unattainable and transformative, and Humbert's inability to pin Lolita down has much to do, I think, with her status as a nymph, which this chapter takes as its main focus; however, just as Lo can be seen as a cheapened American version of her prototype, the sophisticated French Annabel Leigh, Lolita can also be seen as a somewhat cheapened American version of the classical Greek nymph.

For Humbert, the biggest change that threatens Lolita is, as with classical nymphs, metamorphosis. Humbert, unlike Pan, is not concerned with his girl child transforming from a nymph into river reeds or laurel trees, but rather from a girl child into a young woman; puberty is what looms over Humbert's idyllic, Arcadian dream. When Lolita escapes Humbert for the last time in the novel, she is already dead, already, like Ovid's nymphs, embedded in the landscape: "She was only the faint violet whiff and dead leaf echo of the nymphet I had rolled myself upon with such cries in the past; an echo on the brink of a russet ravine, with a far wood under a white sky, and brown leaves choking the brook, and one last cricket in the crisp weeds" (*Lolita* 277). Humbert refers to Lolita as an "echo," and like the nymph Echo, Lolita is only a voice—a voice able to speak only through Humbert. Rather than *capturing* Lolita, Humbert is only able to *recreate* her. Immortality, then, is only a metaphor, both pictorial and verbal: "I am thinking of aurochs and angels, the secret of durable pigments, prophetic sonnets, the refuge of art. And this is the only immortality you and I may share, my Lolita" (*Lolita* 309). Only in dying is the nymphet Lolita allowed to enter her pupa stage, her drowsy cocoon, her "crystal sleep" (*Lolita* 123); however, as "Gray Star," the settlement where Lolita dies, suggests, there can be for Lolita no emerging from the cocoon, as a gray star

sheds no light. Humbert's island, although enchanted, is not an island *inhabited* by the nymphs, but rather *haunted* by them. Death or sublimation in *Lolita* translates into immortality, however metaphorical. In order to "live," Lolita, like classical nymphs, must preserve herself both figuratively and literally by becoming immortal, dying, or sublimating.

Defining *nymph*

In order thoroughly to examine Lolita's status as a nymph, I think it useful to first investigate the classical ancient Greek notion of the nymph. The term "nymph" in both its historical and mythological sense is ambiguous. Larson writes that defining "nymph" is "made more tricky by the ambiguity of the term *numphê*, which can refer not only to the minor female divinities of the wild places but also to any nubile woman or, more commonly, to a bride" (Larson 3). In the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), the term nymph is defined as:

1. **a.** *Myth.* One of a numerous class of semi-divine beings, imagined as beautiful maidens inhabiting the sea, rivers, fountains, hills, woods, or trees, and frequently introduced by the poets as attendants on a superior deity. (Special names for the various kinds of nymphs existed in Greek, and most of these have been employed in English, as *dryad*, *hamadryad*, *naiad*, *Nereid*, *oceanid*, *oread*.)
- b.** *transf.* A stream, river.
2. **a.** *poet.* A young and beautiful woman; hence, a maiden, damsel.
3. **a.** An insect in that stage of development which intervenes between the larva and the imago; a

pupa. **b.** A fishing fly made in imitation of the aquatic larval form of mayflies, insects of the order Ephemeroptera.

There exists much criticism concerning Nabokov's use of allusions in his novels; however, no critic so far has studied or provided a framework through which to read the overarching allusion—that of the Greek nymph—in *Lolita*. The *OED* defines “nymphet” as “a young or little nymph” and secondarily as “a nymph-like or sexually attractive young girl,” and while there has certainly been commentary on *Lolita* being a “nymphet,” these criticisms focus on the “sexually attractive young girl” and do little more than mention *Lolita*'s nubile nature or delve into issues of aesthetics and morality, ignoring the classical nymph tradition from which *Lolita*, through Humbert's enchantment, has emerged. That Humbert Humbert refers to *Lolita* as a nymphet has, obviously, to do with *Lolita* being nubile; however, it is my contention that the reference has much to do with how nymphs are portrayed in classical myths, and Nabokov must have been aware of this when writing *Lolita*.

Vulnerable yet divine, sexual yet virginal, nymphs in the classical tradition are ambiguous, and this nebulous nature makes the nymph attractive yet unattainable. Humbert Humbert stresses this two-fold, sacred and profane nature of *Lolita*; he strips from her the title of “child” and likens her to an ethereal being:

And neither is she the fragile child of a feminine novel. What drives me insane is the twofold nature of this nymphet—of every nymphet, perhaps; this mixture in my *Lolita* of tender dreamy childishness and a kind of eerie

vulgarity, stemming from the snub-nosed cuteness of ads and magazine pictures, from the blurry pinkness of adolescent maidservants in the Old Country (smelling of crushed daisies and sweat); and from very young harlots disguised as children in provincial brothels; and then again, all this gets mixed up with the exquisite stainless tenderness seeping through the musk and the mud, through the dirt and the death, oh God, oh God!

And what is most singular is that she, *this* Lolita, *my* Lolita, had individualized the writer's ancient lust, so that above and over everything there is—Lolita. (*Lolita* 44-45)

Humbert describes Lolita as insectile and earthly yet transcendent. She is “stainless,” yet she exists among the “young harlots disguised as children.” Embodying both life and death, she appears to be an ethereal yet death-enveloped creature both emergent from and buried in the mud. Lolita is ethereal and a child, dead and immortal; her voice is vulgar—punctuated by teenage-American pop-culture slang—and capable of inspiring dithyrambs. Humbert claims that this mixture causes him to go mad. “I am trying,” writes Humbert, “to describe these things not to relive them in my present boundless misery, but to sort out the portion of hell and the portion of heaven in that strange, awful, maddening world—nymphet love. The beastly and beautiful merged at one point, and it is that borderline I would like to fix” (*Lolita* 135). Nabokov's novel then, is not merely the story of Humbert's entrapment of Lolita; it is also the chronicle of Humbert's trials to categorize and catalogue Lolita as well as recreate her. Lolita, who possesses the beastly and the beautiful merged at one point, “used to visit” Humbert in his rented

room at the Haze house “in her dear dirty blue jeans, smelling of orchards in nymphetland” (*Lolita* 92). Nymphs are often associated with the woods, places that are enchanted, hidden, and dark, and here we see Humbert imagining taking Lo deep into the woods of Hourglass Lake: “Lolita! Father and daughter melting into these woods!” (*Lolita* 84). When he attempts (or more exactly forces himself) to have sex with Big Haze, he cringes: “it was still a nymphet’s scent that in despair I tried to pick up, as I bayed through the undergrowth of dark decaying forests” (*Lolita* 77). (Big Haze’s “forest” is “dark” and “decaying” in comparison to Lo’s genitalia.) In “Tithonus,” Tennyson writes, “The woods decay, the woods decay and fall.” Tithonus, in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, was a little old man grasshopper loved by Dawn, who could keep him alive, but who could not keep him young forever. Although Humbert keeps Lo alive through *Lolita*, he is unable to keep her young; his inability to preserve Lolita’s youth makes him remorseful. Humbert’s pursuit of his wood nymph is punctuated by his use of enchantment: he uses the stories and myths of beasts and beauties, satyrs and nymphs, in order to navigate the unknowns of entrapping a child; he is able in large part to fulfill his desires by imagining himself as a Pan-figure seducing a nymph.

Nympholepsy: Humbert as Nympholept

Humbert spends much time trying to define nymphs, and he knows that he is in fact a nympholept. In addition to being a maddening frenzy inspired by nymphs, nympholepsy is “a heightening of awareness and elevated verbal skills believed to result from the nymphs’ influence on a susceptible individual” (Larson 13), the individual in our case being the eloquent prose-stylist Humbert Humbert, or perhaps, more exactly,

Nabokov writing through Humbert Humbert. Lolita, Humbert says, has “individualized the writer’s ancient lust,” which is nympholepsy. Furthermore, Larson writes, “it is this form of nympholepsy to which Sokrates alludes when he playfully announces that he is on the verge of speaking in dithyrambs under the influence of the nymphs of Ilissos. In such contexts, poetry and prophecy, always closely related, cannot be separated, and the nympholept, like the poet, the Sibyl . . . experiences a state of divine madness” (Larson 13). Nympholepsy then is not merely a “divine madness,” but a seizure that moves the “susceptible individual” to create poetry and prophecy as well as to produce eloquent and artful speech and writing. Humbert admits that his writing of “Lolita, or the Confession of a White Widowed Male” is a direct result of nympholepsy: “A greater endeavor lures me on,” so says our nympholept Humbert, “to fix once for all the perilous magic of nymphets” (*Lolita* 134). Humbert’s purpose in writing his confession is therefore both physical and literary. His writing attempts to recreate Lolita as much as it attempts to “fix,” through language, the nature and mystery of nymphets. Although it is understood that the nymphs take possession of the nympholept, “possession may be understood in sexual terms, so that the possessing deity acts as an overmastering sexual partner” (Larson 18). The inspirational nymph, therefore, as in the case of Lolita and Humbert, can act not only as a poetic catalyst but as a sexual one.

Lolita, like traditional nymphs, shuns domesticity, and at times, according to Humbert, acts as the sexual aggressor in her affairs, including those with Humbert, Quilty, and with the boys at Camp Q. Reinforcing the “two-fold nature” of nymphs, Larson claims that “the nymph is a highly ambiguous figure. Though sexually desirable, she is usually free of the familial restrictions applied to mortal women and can rarely be

fully domesticated. Nymphs may be sexually promiscuous, and they often act as the aggressors in ephemeral affairs with mortals” (Larson 4). “It was she who seduced me”— so claims Humbert (*Lolita* 132). When Charlotte dies and Humbert takes Lolita out of Camp Q to travel about the American landscape without mother or home, Lolita, like the nymphs of Larson’s definition, could not be freer of familial restrictions and domesticity. In fact, Humbert threatens Lolita *with a home* when she refuses to comply with his schemes:

I relied . . . on other methods to keep my pubescent concubine in submission and passable temper. A few years before, she had spent a rainy summer under Miss Phalen’s bleary eye in a dilapidated Appalachian farmhouse that had belonged to some gnarled Haze or other in the dead past. It is still among its rank acres of golden rod on the edge of a flowerless forest, at the end of a permanently muddy road, twenty miles from the nearest hamlet. Lo recalled that scarecrow of a house, the solitude, the soggy old pastures, the wind, the bloated wilderness, with an energy of disgust that distorted her mouth and fattened her half-revealed tongue. And it was there that I warned her she would dwell with me in exile for months and years if need be, studying under me French and Latin, unless her “present attitude” changed. (*Lolita* 148-149)

The farmhouse exists on “the edge of a flowerless forest,” in keeping with the theme of “boundaries”—both spatial and temporal—which run through the novel and threaten

Humbert: space and time conspire to take Lolita away from him. There is an edge beyond which even fertile nymph pastures become barren. In ancient Greek culture, according to Larson, “the fertile, moist parts of the landscape were associated with female anatomy in a metaphor that is probably universal. The words *képos* (garden), *leimón* (meadow), *delta*, and *pedion* (plain) were all informal terms that referred to the female genitalia, and maidens picking flowers in meadows . . . are archetypes of sexual vulnerability” (Larson 10). Although pastoral, the farmhouse is far from fecund and exists outside of the realm where nymphs can live; the farm is comprised of “rank acres” of “soggy old pastures” from a “dead past.” It is not the landscape that deters Lolita but the notion of domesticity. The farmhouse, existing at the “end of a permanently muddy road,” offers no refreshment for our nymph and nympholept. Like the nymph Thetis, who abandons Achilles,¹ Lolita, at the novel’s end, ultimately flees her domestic duties. Lolita accomplishes this abandonment, however, through dying: she is a stillborn bride who can only give birth to stillborn offspring and is thus able to transcend the earth duty-free.

Some criticism concerning the lepidopteral aspects of *Lolita* often compares Humbert’s and Quilty’s pursuit of Lolita to that of chasing a butterfly.² There does not

¹ In one version of the story, the sea nymph Thetis tried to make her son Achilles mortal by burning off his mortality over a funeral pyre. When Peleus, Achilles’ father, saw this, he pulled Achilles from the fire. As a result, Thetis, who wanted her son to be immortal, was so outraged that she abandoned Achilles, who was in turn raised by the centaur Cheiron.

² Although many essays refer to *Lolita* as a butterfly chase, the essay that is often quoted is Diana Butler’s “*Lolita* Lepidoptera,” an essay that is often made the subject of jokes in other essays, perhaps due to Nabokov’s dismissal of it. Of this essay, Nabokov responded: “Mrs. Butler’s article is pretentious nonsense from beginning to end” (Pifer 5). It is probably known more through Alfred Appel’s frequently reprinted and cited “*Lolita*: The Springboard of Parody”: “Because Nabokov is not a vapid contriver, his

exist much criticism, however, concerning the specific pet names that Humbert ascribes to Lolita, especially in their etymological and classical senses. Contrary to Trilling, I find that the Greek *νυμφη*, meaning “bride,” has everything to do with “the young of an insect without complete metamorphosis.” Annabel Leigh, whom I see as Humbert’s Nereid, or sea-nymph, as well as Lolita’s prototype, is also Humbert’s “dead bride” (*Lolita* 39). As much as their male pursuers would like to have the nymphs as their brides, that is, to possess them sexually, the nymphs desire to remain virginal. In Ovid, Daphne, the wood nymph, has but one wish—that she may never marry:

. . . But the marriage torches
Were something hateful, criminal, to Daphne,
So she would blush, and put her arms around him, [her father, Peneus]
And coax him: “Let me be a virgin always . . . ”

. . .
And the wood shrank from his kisses, and the god [Apollo]
Exclaimed: “Since you can never be my bride,
My tree at least you shall be! . . . ” (Ovid 17, 20)

Apollo could not possess Daphne, and therefore, he entraps her forever in a tree.

Daphne can remain virginal only at the cost of her body, and Apollo must settle for the sublimated, vegetal form of his beloved. Similarly, Lolita gains immortality at the cost of

most labyrinthine and involuted artifice is of the greatest significance. Nabokov is a well known lepidopterist, and in his poem ‘A Discovery’ (1943) and memoir *Speak, Memory* (1951), he writes evocatively of his entomological forays, of the fleeting moments of ecstasy experienced in catching an exquisite and rare butterfly. It is no accident, as Diana Butler points out, that the object of Humbert’s passion, a nymph, should be, according to the dictionary, *a pupa* or *the young of an insect undergoing incomplete metamorphosis*. Responding to blatant clues planted by Nabokov himself in his essay, ‘On a Book Entitled Lolita,’ Miss Butler demonstrates that the substratum of *Lolita* contains an extensive literary game in which the author’s passion for butterflies, including the congruent joy and horror of the discovery and the necessary kill, has been transferred into Humbert’s passion for nymphets, with Lolita as the butterfly” (Parody 208). Of course, I have to disagree with Appel and Butler about Nabokov’s “most labyrinthine and involuted artifice”; rather than being a butterfly, I contend that it is the nymph that fulfills this category.

her body, and Humbert must settle instead for the literary form of his beloved. Nymphs were understood to be unconquerable yet sexually desirable; therefore, the attainment of a nymph as one's bride was seen not only as a superhuman feat, but also as proof of the pursuer's sexual mastery. In Humbert's world (as well as in current American society), the attainment of a nymph is an illegal feat; it is not, however, proof of the pedophile's sexual mastery, but perhaps it is proof of his ability to deceive and scheme successfully, as Humbert has done. "Nymph" can also refer to a "mayfly," and like brides (and I am thinking of the American tradition of weddings and brides here), mayflies live only for one day—thus undergoing all stages of metamorphosis within a condensed temporal frame—with the sole goal of reproducing, after which they die. Although her child is stillborn, Lolita, similarly, dies after reproduction. May is the traditional month in which to celebrate marriage; brides are prepared for sex, and the bridal gown is a type of silken cocoon, representing the metamorphosis from girl to wife. Like butterflies, brides may emerge as a beautiful species, but because they too are a mixture of the virginal and the sexual, the embodiment of the "beastly and beautiful merged at one point," they possess the twofold nature of the nymph. When the bridal gown is slipped off, they will find waiting for them, more near now than ever, what Nabokov refers to as the "gaping face of the entomologist" (*Butterflies* 473), who is interested in capture, possession, and ultimately death: the newly emerged creature is pinned and mounted, either on the bridal bed or in a display case.

At the Enchanted Hunter's Lodge, Humbert gets close to being this gaping entomologist. Thinking that his "Papa's Purple Pills" were effective in causing Lolita's drug-induced sleep, Humbert, like the gaping entomologist, expresses his anticipation of

possessing her: he would “find [his] nymphet, [his] beauty and bride, emprisoned in her crystal sleep” (*Lolita* 123). “Crystal” is close to “chrysalis,” another term for the pupa stage of metamorphosis. During this stage the specimen is incapable of movement and therefore vulnerable; in the “crystal sleep,” the specimen is still, silent, fragile. Peleus could only possess the nymph Thetis after he had bound her in her sleep; otherwise, she would constantly alter her physical form and elude him. Humbert, like Peleus, desires his “bride” when she is incapable of moving or transforming, “emprisoned in her crystal sleep,” the shortest-lived of all the stages of metamorphosis; therefore, it is crucial that Humbert possess her before she emerges from her cocoon of sleep or, more specifically, childhood. Furthermore, if Nabokov is, as Trilling describes, “a scholar of languages,” as well as a scholar of taxonomic language, especially as it pertains to lepidoptery, then he would have known, according to Maria Warner, that “pupa” is Latin for “little girl” and for “doll.” Warner in her book *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds*, points out that Humbert calls Lolita “a doll,” and “with this writer, wordplay is never less than studied” (*Fantastic* 116). Not only is Dolly (another of Humbert’s pet names for Lolita) already a “little girl,” Humbert, through his pet names, makes her even smaller by appending the diminutive suffixes “ita” and “et” to her. Lolita is also “Little Haze” and “little ghost” dying in “Gray Star,” all of which suggest that she is already a “shade.”³

Traditionally, nymphs would rather cross into the spirit world than cross over into sexual awareness, although both are types of metamorphoses. In the cases of Daphne and Syrinx, the stories detail the pursuit of a maiden by a god. The maidens beg

³ And like Hazel Shade, the daughter of John Shade in Nabokov’s novel *Pale Fire*, and Van and Ada Veen in *Ada*, Lolita has already passed into death at the onset of the novel.

to remain virginal and are only allowed to do so at the cost of their bodies. Ovid describes Syrinx's plight as follows:

. . . she said *No*, and fled, through pathless places,
 Until she came to Ladon's river, flowing
 Peaceful along the sandy banks, whose water
 Halted her flight, and she implored her sisters
 To change her form, and so, when Pan had caught her
 And thought he held a nymph, it was only reeds . . . (Ovid 24)

Accordingly, Pan, like Apollo, must settle for the sublimated vegetal form (the reed) of his respective beloved. The language with which Nabokov describes metamorphosis, like that of Ovid's, is laden with sexual undertones, both violent and virginal:

The pupa splits as the caterpillar had split—it is really a last glorified moult, and the butterfly creeps out—and in its turn hangs down from the twig to dry. She is not handsome at first. She is very damp and bedraggled. But those limp implements of hers that she has disengaged, gradually dry, distend, the veins harden and harden—and in twenty minutes or so she is ready to fly. You have noticed that the caterpillar is a *he*, the pupa an *it*, and the butterfly a *she*. You will ask—what is the feeling of hatching? Oh, no doubt, there is a rush of panic to the head, a thrill of breathlessness and strange sensation, but then the eyes see, in a flow of sunshine, the butterfly sees the world, the large and awful face of the gaping entomologist. (*Butterflies* 473)

Metamorphosis from cocoon to butterfly is associated with sexual awareness: “a rush of panic to the head, a thrill of breathlessness and a strange sensation” can be likened to the thrill of a sexual climax. Lolita is forever on the verge of emerging fully grown; the ability to mix the child and the soon-to-be-bride is the magic of nymphets which drives Humbert on. In her essay, “*Lolita: The Quest for Ecstasy*,” Julia Bader argues that “there remains a tantalizing part of Lolita which is resistant to the process of artistic abstraction, which constantly threatens to grow up and engulf the nymphet part. This stubborn streak is always contemplating escape, and responds shrilly to Humbert’s lovemaking” (Bader 69). Even in the form of a laurel, the bark of Daphne similarly shrinks from the kisses of Apollo. Humbert fears that Lolita’s nymphet nature will escape her as much as he fears that she will physically escape him by running away: he desires a static Arcadian existence—time outside of time—immune to spatial and temporal constraints. He realizes that metamorphosis is inevitable for Lolita and that he can possess her for only a limited time. The one “point” of time—the life span for a bride and nymphet—is in the foreground of Humbert’s mind when he defines “nymphet”:

Now I wish to introduce the following idea. Between the age limits of nine and fourteen there occur maidens who, to certain bewitched travelers, twice or many times older than they, reveal their true nature which is not human, but nymphic (that is, demoniac); and these chosen creatures I propose to designate as “nymphets.”

It will be marked that I substitute time terms for spatial ones. In fact, I would have the reader see “nine” and “fourteen” as the boundaries – the mirrory beaches and rosy rocks – of an enchanted island haunted by those nymphets of mine and surrounded by a vast, misty sea. Between those age limits, are all girl-children nymphets? Of course not. Otherwise, we who are in the know, we lone voyagers, we nympholepts, would have long gone insane. (*Lolita* 16-17)

The island, like the old Haze farm, in addition to serving as an enclosed prison outside of time, is a trope for solipsistic self-absorption—the “mirrory beaches”—because it is totally secluded and uninhabited. Again, the nymphs do not *inhabit* Humbert’s imaginary island; they *haunt* it. Haunting resonates with Humbert’s use of the term “demoniac,” which of course has connotations of malignancy but originates with the morally-neutral term *daimon*, which describes either a divinity somewhat between a god and a mortal or a deceased person regarded as an inferior divinity. The nymph narrative that most closely parallels Humbert Humbert’s solipsism is the one involving Echo and Narcissus: *Lolita* is an echo, unable to exist outside of Humbert’s mind, and *Lolita* then becomes a literary echo. Humbert, always catching glimpses of himself in mirrors and living solely through the lens of his pedophile’s dream, is unable to love Dolores solely as a daughter. By the time Humbert does come to love her not merely for her nymphancy but rather for her person, she has already undergone metamorphosis; Humbert notices that she has started to shrivel, age, and is on the brink of becoming a mere echo.

Nymphs, moreover, are associated with water, and when Lolita is sent to Camp Q, surrounded by Onyx, Eryx, and (the appropriate) Climax Lakes, Humbert becomes perpetually thirsty and experiences “[i]dle dry dreams” (*Lolita* 66). After sitting Lolita on his lap and perversely bouncing her to the *Carmen* song, Humbert “swept up the stairs and set a deluge of steaming water roaring into the tub” (*Lolita* 61). Although an association with a water source pointed traditionally to prophesy, the water here becomes a euphemism for sexual release. Nymphs in ancient Greek culture were associated with sex and also with caves, which were “sites for sexual intercourse (usually of an illicit character), places . . . pleasing to the senses [that] invited passersby to stop and refresh themselves” (Larson 9). Rather than being a “cave deity,” Lolita is pinned as a motel deity, and the two nympholepts, Quilty and Humbert, visit and revisit these watering holes in pursuit of her. While “touring” America, Humbert and Lolita visit the “world’s largest stalagmite” cave, where a sign proclaims that “pubescents,” as if they were the attraction on sale, are “sixty cents” (*Lolita* 155). Humbert and Lo also enter “Crystal Chamber in the longest cave in the world” where “children under 12” are “free,” and where “Lo [is] a young captive” (*Lolita* 157). The captivity is reversed here, however; Greek folktales traditionally concerned themselves with “men held captive in caves by the *neraiides*” (Larson 14). Just as nymphs flee to their water sources for safety—as Syrinx attempts in her flight from Pan—Lolita, by going to camp, a refuge at the lakes of Camp Q, is able to escape, however temporarily, Humbert, who seemed to be on the point of possessing her.

Humbert's "adult disguise"

If Lolita exists forever as a nymph in Humbert's mind, so too does Humbert harbor a belief that he can forever remain a faunlet; that is, Humbert uses enchantment—telling himself that he is a faunlet—in order both to justify his nympholeptic desires and navigate the illicit behavior of pursuing nymphs. Humbert, however, if he ever was a faunlet, has already undergone metamorphosis and exists outside the enchanted wood where it is acceptable to frolic with nymphs. Peter Pan may continue to occupy his faunlet's body as long as he lives in exile, that is, in Neverland; Humbert Humbert, however, truly exiled from Arcadia, cannot. Humbert, like nymphs, is himself an ambiguous creature, and throughout the novel, we see how Nabokov allows Humbert to transform, albeit only mentally. When he first meets Lolita, he says that he sees his nymph while he is in his "adult disguise" (*Lolita* 39). If any character in the novel possesses the magic to transform, it is Humbert: we see him as a young lad, a polar explorer, a scholar, a Frenchman, an American, a madman, a husband, a father, a dashing handsome movie star, a pedophile, an artist, and a murderer. More curious are the names and descriptions that Humbert ascribes to himself: "Humbert the Cubus" (as if he were attempting to desexualize or neutralize his demonic pursuit of Lolita—he is neither incubus nor succubus) (*Lolita* 71), "Green Goat" (referring to himself as Pan) (*Lolita* 73), "a heavy-limbed, foul-smelling adult" (*Lolita* 140), and "Humbert the Wounded Spider" (*Lolita* 54). Humbert writes in his Ramsdale diary: "*Tuesday*. Clouds again interfered with that picnic on that unattainable lake. Is it Fate scheming? Yesterday I tried on before the mirror a new pair of bathing trunks" (*Lolita* 50). The little faun Humbert tries on his faun outfit and discovers that he has taken on the horrific

shape of a mortal man. Humbert, now a Green Goat, an Old Pan, sees himself as a fallen faun: “When I was a child and she was a child, my little Annabel was no nymphet to me; I was her equal, a faunlet in my own right, on that same enchanted island of time” (*Lolita* 17-18). Humbert also sees himself as the Pan of Ramsdale. Spying two of Lo’s friends walking down the street, he thinks, “[t]he prettier of the two little girls (Mable, I think), shorts, halter with little to halt, bright hair—a nymphet, by Pan!—ran back down the street crumpling her paper bag and was hidden from this Green Goat by the frontage of Mr. and Mrs. Humbert’s residence” (*Lolita* 73). Humbert refers to “Mr. and Mrs. Humbert” as if he were not Mr. Humbert: Mr. Humbert is someone else, and he is, in actuality, Pan. He owns the ability to disguise and metamorphose, as when he first spies Lolita: “I passed by her in my adult disguise (a great big handsome hunk of movieland manhood), the vacuum of my soul managed to suck in every detail of her bright beauty” (*Lolita* 39). In *Ethics, Evil, and Fiction*, Colin McGinn suggests that these outward descriptions are more truthfully intimations of Humbert’s soul. He writes:

Inside him, indeed, Humbert is hardly a human being at all, but an alien creature squinting through treacherous eyes. He is described variously as apelike, as a spider, as a “pentapod monster,” as “just two eyes and a foot of engorged brawn”—while to the outside world he is the polished and reserved gentleman that forms his disguise. He is, in fact, a marvel of aesthetic duplicity, a kind of artistic confidence-trick: “Humbert Humbert, with thick black eyebrows and a queer accent, and a cesspoolful of rotting monsters behind his slow boyish smile.” It is not merely that he is

grotesque within and perfectly presentable on the outside; his very spiritual repulsiveness expresses itself in the most exquisite and cultivated prose. Nabokov has, in the person of Humbert Humbert, completely bamboozled our habitual reactions to good and evil, the ugly and the beautiful. *Lolita* is a novel of aesthetic and moral trespasses. (McGinn 109)

Humbert's conflicting inner and outer appearances, his ambiguous nature, his ability to own both "the ugly and the beautiful," make it difficult completely to criminalize him. He is a pervert, a rapist, a pedophile; however, he is also, if we are to take the novel at face-value, a writer of masterful prose and the avenger of Lolita's other child-rapist, Quilty. Humbert calls himself an "artist" and a "madman" and a "creature of infinite melancholy" (*Lolita* 17). His ability to transform enables him to produce "the most exquisite and cultivated prose." Humbert metamorphoses through his catharsis; if he begins as a faunlet who cries "merman tears," then by the novel's end, we find a Humbert who recognizes Lolita's mortality and who is now able to also perceive himself as completely mortal. Humbert, by the novel's end, cries not the tears of a monster but rather the tears of a human. He says, "when you bear in mind that these were the raised eyebrows and parted lips of a child, you may better appreciate what depths of calculated carnality, what reflected despair, restrained me from falling at her dear feet and dissolving in human tears" (*Lolita* 283-284). Moreover, Humbert's nature oscillates between that of the repentant and that of the criminal. If he was able to free Lolita from his claws upon

her leaving for camp, no matter his state of sexual arousal, he is also capable of keeping Lolita prisoner:

. . . the tenderness would deepen to shame and despair, and I would lull and rock my lone Lolita in my marble arms, and moan in her warm hair, and caress her at random and mutely ask her blessing, and at the peak of this human agonized selfless tenderness (with my soul actually hanging around her naked body and ready to repent), all at once, ironically, horribly, lust would swell again—and “oh, *no*,” Lolita would say with a sigh to heaven, and the next moment the tenderness and the azure—all would be shattered. (*Lolita* 285)

Humbert’s sexual perversions trap him in the guise of a monster. As long as he sees Lolita through a sexual lens, he is incapable of humanity, expressing instead the ravaging, animalistic, delirious, unrestrained, hunting-and-capturing at-all-costs drives of Apollo and Pan. Using enchantment, he suggests that he himself is no longer human but rather divinely preserved; he refers to his arms as “marble” and says that the tender scene has the ability to shatter. He sees Lolita as well as himself as already immortalized, entrapped, and preserved in art.

Lolita concerns the impossibilities of eternal youth and immortality, and Lolita shares similarities to Sibyl, the nymph who requested eternal life but failed to request eternal youth as well. Having grown up without a mother, Humbert is raised in part by his aunt Sybil, who succeeds in her goal of raising him to be a “widower” (as was

Humbert's father). We know that she "had pink-rimmed azure eyes and a waxen complexion. She wrote poetry. She was poetically superstitious. She said she knew she would die soon after [Humbert's] sixteenth birthday, and did" (*Lolita* 10). In Nabokov's description of Sybil there is much indication that Humbert's aunt is an allusion to the nymph Sibyl.⁴ Sibyl was also said to speak, or prophesize, through poetry. Like Echo's, Sibyl's voice is virtually all that remains after her body has shriveled away. Likewise, by entrapping Lolita in the literary landscape of his confessions, Humbert allows Lolita's voice to only exist as an echo in *Lolita* after Dolores Haze's body has, in effect, shriveled away; Lo's youth may exist forever in *Lolita*, but her youthful body does not. Sibyl's condition, as it is with so many nymphs, was the result of her declining the love of a male pursuer, in this case Apollo. The last time Humbert sees Lolita, Nabokov gives her Aunt Sybil's eyes: she wears "pink-rimmed glasses" (*Lolita* 269), which resemble Sybil's eyes, which were "pink-rimmed" as well. And like the Sibyl, Lolita's youth has gone; her youthful body now shows the marks of womanhood and age. This is not to say that the two—Humbert's aunt and Humbert's nymphet—have synthesized; rather, it is to suggest that Lolita has been given, as nymphs were purported to have, the gift of prophecy, as symbolized by her glasses. Larson writes that "the attribution of divinatory powers to the nymphs . . . was not uncommon in the Greek world. The nymphs' fundamental association with water, the vector of prophecy and inspiration, and their close association with the manic god Apollo were both salient factors" (Larson 11). Like Sibyl, Lolita has become an oracle to whom Humbert addresses his concern and seeks his answer.

Namely, he wishes for Lolita to reveal the identity of the person he wishes to murder. In

⁴ Note that Humbert's aunt is spelled "Sybil" and the nymph is spelled "Sibyl," as it is in all of the mythology I consulted.

her prophecies, the Sibyl reveals answers in the form of riddles; Lolita, on the other hand, solves the riddle that runs throughout the novel, mainly the riddle of “Q,” whose clues are embedded within the novel for both Humbert and reader alike. Like Daphne fleeing from Apollo, Sibyl’s wish to remain virginal was granted at the cost of her body:

. . . I once was offered
 Eternal life, if I had let Apollo
 Take me, still virgin. While he was hopeful,
 Seeking to bend my will with gifts, he told me
Choose what you will, O maid, and you shall have it.
 I pointed to a heap of sand and uttered
 The foolish prayer that my years might be as many
 As there were sand-grains in that mound. I should have
 Asked that those years should be forever young,
 But I forgot. He granted me the years,
 And promised endless youth if he could have me,
 But I refused Apollo, and no man
 Has ever had me. Now my happier days
 Are gone, and sick old age comes tottering on . . . (Ovid 342 - 343)

Sibyl’s body shrivels away as she ages; however, her voice, like Echo’s, remains. Like Sibyl, Lolita declines the love of her pursuer and therefore cannot remain eternally youthful; Humbert notices her “ruined looks and her adult, rope-veined narrow hands and her gooseflesh white arms, and her shallow ears, and her unkempt armpits” (*Lolita* 278). Underneath her adult disguise, however, Humbert is still able to make out *his* Lolita:

I insist the world know how much I loved my Lolita, *this* Lolita, pale and polluted, and big with another’s child, but still gray-eyed, still sooty-lashed, still auburn and almond, still Carmencita, still mine; *Changeons de vie, ma Carmen, allons vivre quelque part où nous ne serons jamais séparés*; Ohio? The

wilds of Massachusetts? No matter, even if those eyes of hers would fade to myopic fish, and her nipples swell and crack, and her lovely young velvety delicate delta be tainted and torn—even then I would go mad with tenderness at the mere sight of your dear wan face, at the sound of your raucous young voice, my Lolita. (*Lolita* 278)

Lolita's voice—that echo of her nymphet self—has the power to conjure for Humbert his “ancient lust”; her voice remains both youthful and immortal, although her body does not. Humbert, after all, still refers to her “young voice” amidst the aging and decay. In keeping with the nymphs' sublimation into landscapes, Nabokov has Humbert describe the demise of Lolita's youth in terms of erosion (“swell and crack”), landscapes (“delta,” which is also the informal, ancient term for the female genitalia), and nature (“fish”).

“In the Greek imagination,” writes Larson, “nymphs are inseparable from the landscape,” and Lolita is not only inseparable from the landscapes in *Lolita*, she is also inseparable from the literary landscape of the novel itself. By using enchantment, telling himself as well as his readers a fairytale-like or myth-like story of his nymph and his part as Pan or a faun, Humbert forever fixes Lolita and entraps her as *Lolita*. The nymph Daphne is forever fixed as a laurel tree; Syrinx forever rustles only as river reeds. “That was my Lo,” says Charlotte, “and these are my lilies” (*Lolita* 40). For Humbert the lilies and Lo are one and the same. He says, “They are beautiful, beautiful, beautiful!” (*Lolita* 40). Although Lo “was to eclipse completely her prototype [Annabel Leigh],” Humbert remains acutely aware of the cheapened nature of Lolita's idyllic American settings: she is

not the odalisque among the mythical gardens, but rather, she is the crude child in “the piazza,” which Charlotte pretentiously refers to her backyard, a cheapened version of Humbert’s childhood Riviera. Humbert’s attempts to fuse the landscape and his lust fail in America:

However, in recollection, I suppose, of my hopeless hauntings of public parks in Europe, I was still keenly interested in outdoor activities and desirous of finding suitable playgrounds in the open where I had suffered such shameful privations. Here, too, I was to be thwarted. The disappointment I must now register (as I gently grade my story into an expression of the continuous risk and dread that ran through my bliss) should in no wise reflect on the lyrical, epic, tragic but never Arcadian American wilds . . . in the Wilds of America the open-air lover will not find it easy to indulge in the most ancient of all crimes and pastimes. Poisonous plants burn his sweetheart’s buttocks, nameless insects sting his; sharp items of the forest floor prick his knees, insects hers; and all around there abides a sustained rustle of potential snakes—*que dis-je*, of semi-extinct dragons!—while the crablike seeds of ferocious flowers cling, in the hideous green crust, to gartered black sock and sloppy white sock alike. (*Lolita* 168)

The Riveria at one time allowed Humbert an Arcadian refuge with Annabel Leigh, but the American highway will not yield to Humbert’s wish to recreate his faunlet scenes

using Lo. Nature, like a nymph, is two-fold: inviting yet invasive. Sex itself is both a “crime” and a “pastime” with which nature is unable to comply: up close, seemingly harmless plants are “poisonous,” and flowers, instead of imparting beauty, are “ferocious.” If the landscape at one time accepted Humbert’s sexual wiles, he is no longer welcome. (If nymphs are inseparable from the landscape, then Lolita can also be seen as both “poisonous” and “ferocious.”) There always existed, in the American landscape on the side of highways, a risk of detection, which “curbed forever” Humbert’s “yearning for rural amours” (*Lolita* 169). Humbert refers to indulging sexually with a nymph as the “most ancient of all crimes and pastimes,” which alludes to his cataloging of various affairs between nympholepts and girl children, specifically writers: “Virginia was not quite fourteen when Harry Edgar possessed her,” “Dante fell madly in love with his Beatrice when she was nine,” and “[w]hen Petrarch fell madly in love in his Laureen, she was a fair-haired nymphet of twelve running in the wind, in the pollen and dust, a flower in flight” (*Lolita* 19). Humbert’s favorite allusion, however, is to Poe and Virginia, and he realizes that the reader will wonder whether he tried to relive his love affair by the sea, with Lolita as a substitute for Annabel Leigh:

. . . let me tell you that I *did* look for a beach, though I also have to confess that by the time we reached its mirage of gray water, so many delights had already been granted me by my traveling companion that the search for a Kingdom by the Sea, a Sublimated Riviera, or whatnot, far from being the impulse of the subconscious, had become the rational

pursuit of a purely theoretical thrill. The angels knew it, and arranged things accordingly. (*Lolita* 167)

The sea-side amours were equally disappointing for our nympholept Humbert, this time with a blow to Freud, whom Nabokov especially, it seems, enjoyed taking jabs at in his writings. Here, we see how Humbert guards against this Freudian reader who might be sympathetic to his attempts to relive this sublimated past with Annabel Lee. We know that despite Humbert's justification of his actions, he sees himself as a monster and that *Lolita* is not a replacement for his Riviera Annabel Lee but rather another, albeit, more maddening nymph.

Humbert and McFate

Nabokov adds another arresting element to Humbert's nympholepsy by configuring a psychological drama of fate, which Humbert uses to further his enchantment by convincing himself that "McFate" is behind, indeed responsible for not only setting up the conditions that allow him to explore his nympholeptic and pedophilic desires but also make him the culprit should he act on those desires. Humbert blames the "angels" for his failed roadside amours with Lo, and throughout the novel, Nabokov informs us that there are agents that either thwart or help Humbert in his pursuit of his nymph. Fate is a "synchronizing phantom" (*Lolita* 103), and a poet, says Humbert, loves "dazzling coincidences" (*Lolita* 31). Accordingly, Humbert uses "fate" as a means to justify his nympholeptic actions. The angels, after all, arranged for his meeting with *Lolita*—the deceased perfumery uncle, his travels to America, the

McCoo house, where he was originally supposed to stay, burning down upon his arrival in Ramsdale⁵—as well as arranged for his possession of Lolita, with Charlotte ruled out by the *fatal* car accident. Humbert says of the accident, “I had actually seen the agent of fate” (*Lolita* 103). In *Reading Nabokov*, Douglas Fowler writes that “by making ‘precise fate’ responsible for the tragedy, Nabokov maintains Humbert’s humanity if not his unequivocal innocence” (Fowler 148). Although the angels might have “arranged” for Humbert to possess Lolita and moreover to possess her in an outdoor rendezvous, a “Sublimated Riviera,” Humbert finds, when attempting to make love to Lolita on the seashore, that “the sand was gritty and clammy, and Lo was all gooseflesh and grit, and for the first time in my life I had as little desire for her as for a manatee” (*Lolita* 167). The Arcadian ideal refuses to harmonize with Humbert’s sexual desires, precisely because Humbert is stricken with nympholepsy, which by its very definition is a madness and a longing for the unattainable. In his essay “Parody and Authenticity in *Lolita*,” Thomas R. Frosch writes that “the quest is . . . an impossible one from the outset; it is variously presented as a quest for Arcadia, for the past, for the unattainable itself; it is nympholepsy” (Bloom 83). Humbert’s Arcadia, of course, was experienced with Annabel Leigh; he describes how Annabel haunted him before and after her death:

The spiritual and the physical had been blended in us with a perfection that must remain incomprehensible to the matter-of-fact, crude, standard-brained youngsters of today. Long after her death I felt her thoughts

⁵ “Dale” was often coupled with “Arcadian,” as in John Keats’ “Ode to a Grecian Urn,” in which nymphs romp in “Arcadian dales”; “Ram,” of course, is a reference to Pan.

floating through mine. Long before we met we had had the same dreams. We compared notes. We found strange affinities. The same June of the same year (1919) a stray canary had fluttered into her house and mine, in two widely separated countries. Oh, Lolita, had *you* loved me thus! (*Lolita* 14)

Before Humbert possesses her through his *Carmen* number, Nabokov, in his signature style of presenting the reader with seemingly laden symbols only to later deny that they meant *anything* at all, here presents us with Lolita playing with an apple by tossing it into the air, and “Humbert Humbert intercept[s] the apple” (*Lolita* 58). Lolita does not offer the fruit to him, and therefore does not “love” him as Annabel had. Although Humbert possesses Lolita sexually, she still remains unattainable: through Lolita, he can neither recover nor relive his ideal Edenic or Arcadian love that he experienced with Annabel Leigh, whom he also does not possess fully. In fact, he scorns Lolita for not loving him as Annabel had.

In trying to overcome or succumb to his madness, Humbert’s actions can only be met with failure. “(A bad accident is to happen quite soon),” (*Lolita* 79) Humbert tells us in a parenthetical statement, the same manner in which he tells us of his mother’s death: “(picnic, lightning)” (*Lolita* 10). It is not so much detection that Humbert fears, but rather accidents spurned by fate that will not work in his favor: Lolita, too, because of her nymphet-nature, is destined to flee from him, and her escape will go undetected. Humbert realizes that his possession of Lolita will never be quite complete: “the disappointment I must now register (as I gently grade my story into an expression of the

continuous risk and dread that ran through my bliss) should in no wise reflect on the lyrical, epic, tragic but never Arcadian American wilds” (*Lolita* 168). He cannot possess her, but rather, he continues to be possessed by her.

Lolita concerns the spatial and temporal constraints on its protagonist, constraints that threaten to enable his nymphet to emerge into a fully-formed adult. It is, says Humbert, “the elusive, shifty, soul-shattering, insidious charm that separates the nymphet from the coevals of hers as are incomparably more dependent on the spatial world of synchronous phenomena than on that intangible island of entranced time where *Lolita* plays with her likes” (*Lolita* 17). Whether this island is the solipsistic island of Humbert’s nympholeptic imaginings or indeed Arcadia, real time, as opposed to “entranced time,” threatens to invade the island. Even Arcadia, the ruler of which was Chronus⁶ (or Time), was not free of this threat. When *Lolita* leaves for camp, Humbert realizes, more than ever, the threat of metamorphosis that looms over his precious nymphet. On the morning of Lo’s departure, Humbert is both gentle and monstrous in a scene that seems to exist in time outside of time, that is, in Humbert’s solipsistic entranced time or Arcadian time:

A moment later I heard my sweetheart running up the stairs. My heart expanded with such force that it almost blotted me out. I hitched up the pants of my pajamas, flung the door open: and simultaneously *Lolita*

⁶ Coincidentally, Chronus was a violator of youth; he was believed to have eaten his own children. Moreover, Hesiod in *Works and Days*, gives us this picture of Arcadia: “In the Golden Age—they were in the time of Chronus, when he was king in Heaven; and they lived like gods, with carefree heart, remote from toil and misery. Retching old age did not affect them either, but with hands and feet ever unchanged they enjoyed themselves in feasting, beyond all ills, and they died as overcome by sleep” (Hesiod 40).

arrived, in her Sunday frock, stamping, panting, and then she was in my arms, her innocent mouth melting under the ferocious pressure of dark male jaws, my palpitating darling! The next instant I heard her—alive, unraped—clatter downstairs. The motion of fate was resumed. (*Lolita* 66)

In his arms, spatially close, Lolita also exists outside of time. Although Humbert is able to step outside of time and reality, he does not take advantage (even if she caught him off-guard—most likely engaged in masturbation—we never know exactly *why* his pajama pants were down in the first place, but we do know that he was watching her from his window): sexually aroused, he manages somehow to overcome his desires and free her from his claws to set her back into the temporal world unharmed, knowing she will be gone for two precious nymphet-time months:

In two years or so she would cease being a nymphet and would turn into a “young girl,” and then, into a “college girl”—that horror of horrors. The word “forever” referred only to my own passion, to the eternal Lolita as reflected in my blood. The Lolita whose iliac crests had not yet flared, the Lolita that today I could touch and smell and hear and see, the Lolita of the strident voice and the rich brown hair—of the bangs and the swirls at the sides and the curls at the back, and the sticky hot neck, and the vulgar vocabulary—“revolting,” “super,” “luscious,” “goon,” “drip”—*that* Lolita,

my Lolita, poor Catullus⁷ would lose forever. So how could I afford not to see her for two months of summer insomnias? Two whole months out of the two years of her remaining nymphage! (*Lolita* 65-66)

“Nymphage” reminds one of “orphanage,” and because Lolita is soon to lose her mother and has already lost her father, this similarity seems especially foreboding. Moreover, for Humbert, Lolita can only exist while in the “nymphage” or while she is of “nymph age.” In his parting embrace with Lolita, the spatial and the temporal merge, and it is almost as if Humbert believes that by holding Lolita, by keeping her close, he can prevent fate from working its art of metamorphosis on her.

Poplars and McFate

Although there are many moments in the novel in which we find Humbert insisting that the scene has been set just so and just for him and just so he can take advantage of Lo, Nabokov also produces poplar trees to serve as an “agent of fate.” Just as there lacks a study on the classical nymph and *Lolita*, there has not been a study or serious mention of Nabokov’s use of poplar trees, which are associated with the classical nymph. Try as he might to avoid nymphet love, Humbert believes that the agent of fate, referred to as “Aubrey McFate” (*Lolita* 56), arranges the world, erects the poplars, makes it possible for Humbert to find his nymphet parading in the American landscape, the woods of some suburban backyard:

⁷ For a study on Nabokov’s allusion to Catullus in *Lolita*, see Gary Dyer’s “Humbert Humbert’s Use of Catullus 58 in *Lolita*.”

The child knew nothing. I had done nothing to her. And nothing prevented me from repeating a performance that affected her as little as if she were a photographic image rippling upon a screen and I a humble hunchback abusing myself in the dark. The afternoon drifted on and on, in ripe silence, and the sappy tall trees seemed to be in the know. (*Lolita* 62)

In a novel that evokes the cinematographic age, in which our dear nympholept seems intent on but unable to recall his darlings except in small fractions, hazy glimpses, unclear shots, fluttering ghost images, the language of “performance” looms larger than merely signifying “sexual performance.” After all, the novel is full of witnesses, and Humbert knows this, knows that he is, indeed, *performing* for his audience, which consists of the confession’s editor John Ray, Jr., the prison wardens, the court, the judge, the jury, future unknown readers, and the more silent but transcendental ones, Aubrey McFate, the “winged jury,” and the trees. “[A]nd while mamma is in the kitchen,” says Humbert, “let a repetition of the davenport scene be staged” (*Lolita* 62). Homer described the “lovely abodes of Kalypso,” home of the “Ithakan nymphs” (Larson 10) with poplar trees, the same trees that surround Lolita’s home. On their travels, Humbert and Lolita visit “a motel called Poplar Shade in Utah, where six pubescent trees were scarcely taller than my Lolita” (*Lolita* 158). This personification of trees also harks back, of course, to the nymph Daphne and the dryads.

The poplars—makeshift, conspiratorial, seemingly erected by Humbert’s agents of fate—alone witness what transpires when, in the throes of a nymphet-induced ecstasy,

actual time stops for Humbert and he enters entranced time. Poplars, known for growing in fertile and moist places, have, according to the *OED*, “tremulous leaves.” When she leaves for summer camp, we learn that Lolita waves goodbye to the trees, while Humbert, with pajama trousers undone, notes from his bedroom window that Lolita will never see those trees again. When Humbert first “possesses” his nymphet—her blonde legs on his lap, his desire masked only by a silky, royal robe—as it happens in fairy tales, time stops. Humbert, the nympholept, conflates Lolita’s limbs with the silvery limbs of the poplars, while at the same time evokes the poplars that shade the Haze house: “Lolita had been safely solipsized. The implied sun pulsed in the supplied poplars; we were fantastically and divinely alone” (*Lolita* 60). The sun and trees, stars and things dazzling or leafy and shady, figure prominently when Humbert exists in this nymphet-induced time outside of time. On the road, as if to shelter his nymphet in the very world of wonder that springs up about him, Humbert takes her to “Poplar Cave, N.C.” (*Lolita* 155). When Lolita tells Humbert, “Look, make Mother take you and me to Our Glass Lake tomorrow,” Humbert notes that “[t]he reflection of the afternoon sun, a dazzling white diamond with innumerable iridescent spikes quivered on the round back of a parked car. The leafage of a voluminous elm played its mellow shadows upon the clapboard wall of the house. Two poplars shivered and shook” (*Lolita* 45). The lake should be *Hourglass* Lake; however, amid the stars and the poplars, entangled as he is in Lolita’s voice and limbs, time, as it so happens in fairy tales, suddenly ceases to exist for the enchanted Humbert. With Lolita, there is no hourglass, a marker of time; there is only *our* glass.

If Nabokov uses the poplars to signal nympholeptic interludes, he also uses them to signal that these interludes are threatened. As if she were wishing to destroy Humbert's paradisaical nymph grove, as if she were trying to wrestle free from Humbert's agents of fate, one morning, Humbert finds Lo, "[b]ending over a window sill, in the act of tearing off leaves from a poplar outside while engrossed in torrential talk with the newspaper boy below" (*Lolita* 54). Not only is Lo seeking companionship with one of her kind, a faunlet delivering the "Ramsdale *Journal*," she seems *to know* that the trees are *in the know*, that the poplars will, somehow, grow up around her like the entangling weeds of a Sleeping Beauty fairytale and make a prisoner of her. Humbert catches her in an act of nymphet defiance, destroying the very agents of Humbert's fate. Additionally, after Charlotte's death, when Humbert leaves to retrieve Lolita from camp, he notices:

. . . the elms and the poplars were turning their ruffled backs to a sudden onslaught of wind, and a black thunderhead loomed above Ramsdale's white church tower when I looked around me for the last time. For unknown adventures I was leaving the livid house where I had rented a room only ten weeks before. The shades—thrifty, practical bamboo shades—were already down. (*Lolita* 103)

The association between the nymph-like poplars and the portentous shade is less happenstance (trees producing shade) than intention. If nymphs are the poplars responding fearfully to circumstances in the novel, then the shade is not so much their production but rather what threatens them—if we are after all to remember that this is a

novel of classical associations of the nymph, the author of which is, as Trilling asserts, a “scholar of languages.” Humbert’s name comes from the Latin “umbra,” meaning primarily “shade” and also “shadow; a shady place; protection; idleness, pleasant rest; a phantom, ghost, shade, semblance; an uninvited guest; a fish, perhaps grayling.”⁸ While touring the peculiar sights of America, Humbert, emerging from a post office, finds Lo gone: “The new and beautiful post office I had just emerged from stood between a dormant movie house and a conspiracy of poplars” (*Lolita* 224). The poplars, dryads or wood nymphs in their own right, having witnessed Humbert’s theft of Lolita, his kidnapping of her youth, his sexual indecencies with her, now seem to have been erected by McFate; they have come into existence this time not to *witness* but rather to turn against Humbert, to take, shelter, and save the nymph, one of their very own, from Humbert the monster’s claws. Without Lo, the movie house is *dormant*; it will not play again the scenes that Humbert wishes to repeat, scenes in which he possesses his starlet, his nymphet.

Other Regions

Nymphs are traditionally associated with both the landscape and, as I see it, a death narrative; in *Lolita*, we see how Nabokov fuses these elements, embedding Lolita into landscapes that portend or contain elements of death. “Nymphets,” Humbert Humbert discovers during his arctic expedition, “do not occur in polar regions” (*Lolita* 33). The arctic landscape, with its “dejected vegetation as willow scrub and lichen” (*Lolita* 33), exists outside of the Arcadian dale where nymphs can live and play.

⁸ Definition is taken from the University of Notre Dame’s on-line Latin Dictionary.

According to Larson's taxonomy, nymphs are by nature always associated with "mortality and a death narrative" (Larson 4), and although they "enjoyed a superhuman lifespan far outstripping that of mortal men and women" (Larson 4), they too succumb to death, or as I like to think, a metaphorical death or a sublimation into the landscape. On what would have been Lo's fifteenth birthday, when she would have ceased to exist within the boundaries of nymph-time, Humbert collects her belongings, "a box of books, her bicycle, old coats, galoshes" and "mailed everything as an anonymous gift to a home for orphaned girls on a windy lake, on the Canadian border" (*Lolita* 255). These bits and pieces of Lo, like little ghosts of Lo, remind the reader precisely of those fragments of Lo that Humbert spies when he first surveys the Haze house; the lists of belongings here, however, do not announce the little girl Lo coming into Humbert's surroundings but rather her departure as well as her metamorphosis from girl to woman. The Canadian border seems to point to the borders of time, the limits of nymph-age, and the borders between sandy islands, where nymphs can exist, and "polar regions," where nymphs cannot. Knowing that nymphs cannot exist in "polar regions," Humbert nonetheless gives Lolita money, which makes possible her move to Alaska with Richard F. Schiller, who has "Arctic blue eyes" (*Lolita* 273) and the word "chill" in his surname and is—in contrast to a faunlet—hard-of-hearing and physically deteriorating. "There is no point in staying anywhere," (*Lolita* 244) Lolita says to Humbert at the hospital before she escapes him. Moving anywhere can only prove futile or fatal for Lolita. She never makes it to Alaska; she dies en-route.

Lolita's prototype, the typhus-stricken Annabel Leigh, died before Humbert could fully possess her, and she remains forever as a Nereid, or sea-nymph, of the Hotel

Mirana, embedded in seashores, forever a torrential typhoon in Humbert's memory: "I was on my knees, and on the point of possessing my darling, when two bearded bathers, the old man of the sea and his brother, came out of the sea with exclamations of ribald encouragement, and four months later she died of typhus in Corfu" (*Lolita* 13). The Hotel "Mirana" (perhaps a combination of "mer" or "sea" and "ana" or "Anna") is phonetically close to "Myrina," which was a grotto that served as a tomb for certain sea-nymphs (Larson 197). Similarly, in the Enchanted Hunters' Lodge, where Humbert first possesses Lolita, Nabokov already foretells the death-narrative of nymphs: the lodge's dining room featured "maudlin murals depicting enchanted hunters in various postures and states of enchantment amid a medley of pallid animals, dryads and trees" (*Lolita* 121). Charlotte also escapes Humbert, but only at the cost her life. Humbert is glad that she does not die by water, yet he fixes her eternally within a landscape: "Oh, my poor Charlotte, do not hate me in your eternal heaven among an eternal alchemy of asphalt and rubber and metal and stone—but thank God, not water, not water!" (*Lolita* 88). Humbert's gratitude here might signify either his relief that he did not kill Charlotte by drowning her, as he had fantasized at Hourglass Lake, or perhaps his relief that she did not die a traditional nymph's death.

"Profession: none, or 'starlet'"

Lolita is a perfectly preserved butterfly specimen: that is, she gives the illusion of being alive. Perhaps it is this quality of the nymph—the art of mimicry—that inspired Nabokov to use the cinema, with its ability to produce movie stars seemingly so alive on the screen as well as its ability to preserve but not keep alive, as an overarching trope in

the novel. In a poem, written long after Lo has gone from him, Humbert writes of Lolita: “Profession: none, or ‘starlet’” (*Lolita* 255). For Lo, as we know from the davenport scene, is a *starlet*, the vixen of Humbert’s film: “All at once,” says Humbert, having observed Lo’s careful study of movie stars and scenes, “I knew I could kiss her with perfect impunity. I knew she would let me do so, and even close her eyes as Hollywood teaches” (*Lolita* 48). Humbert notes that Lolita is “[a] modern child, an avid reader of movie magazines, an expert in dream-slow close-ups” (*Lolita* 49). Being sent away to camp is not what sends Lolita into a fury, but rather having to dispose of her starlet nightgowns, her nymphet costumes, so says her grown mother: “I told her we would exchange tomorrow for plainer stuff some much too cute night things that she bullied me into buying her. You see, *she* sees herself as a starlet; *I* see her as a sturdy, healthy, but decidedly homely kid. This, I guess, is at the root of our troubles” (*Lolita* 65). Although Lo may not know it, she has won the role of Annabel Leigh, Humbert’s dead bride. In a novel that centers on memory and the recording agents of memory (film, writing, photographs), Humbert wants to rely on his visual memories, yet when trying to evoke either Annabel or Lolita, his memory fails him and forms fragmented, hazy girls instead:

I remember her [Annabel’s] features far less distinctly today than I did a few years ago, before I knew Lolita. There are two kinds of visual memory: one when you skillfully recreate an image in the laboratory of your mind, with your eyes open (and then I see Annabel in such general terms as: “honey-colored skin,” “thin arms,” “brown bobbed hair,” “long

lashes,” “big bright mouth”); and the other when you instantly evoke, with shut eyes, on the dark innerside of your eyelids, the objective, absolutely optical replica on a beloved face, a little ghost in natural colors (and this is how I see Lolita). (*Lolita* 11)

“We washed zillions of dishes,” says Lo when Humbert picks her up from Camp Q. “‘Zillions’ you know is schoolmarm’s slang for many-many-many-many. Oh yes, last but not least, as Mother says—Now let me see—what was it? I know: We made shadowgraphs. Gee, what fun” (*Lolita* 114). Humbert creates zillions of Lolitas, many-many-many-many Lolitas. He sees her as an “optical replica,” a copy of a copy, capable of being reproduced over and over again.⁹ In the department store, Humbert does not see the girls’ clothing; instead, as if watching images projected onto a screen, he sees “phantom little Lolitas dancing, falling, daisyding all over the counter” (*Lolita* 108). Humbert, confident that he could have chosen clothes for Lolita without having known her measurements, says, “Apart from measurements, I could of course visualize Lolita with hallucinational lucidity” (*Lolita* 107). Lolita’s measurements present a fragmented girl child while Humbert’s visualization captures her within a lucid, albeit imaginary, rendering. Both Los, the one who appears as data on the page and the one who appears in Humbert’s mind, are phantasmagoric. In the clothing store, the various possibilities excite Humbert, and he chooses how he wishes to dress his nymphet: “I had next great fun with all kinds of shorts and briefs—phantom Lolitas dancing, falling, daisyding all

⁹ This replication of girls is visually played out in Henry Darger’s collages. At first, Darger traces the same images of little girls over and over into his paintings. Later, he has them mimeographed and then later enlarged to various sizes and mimeographed until he has an endless chain of girls in any size that he might want them.

over the counter” (*Lolita* 108). The ghosts of Lolita hang on clothes racks, fall on the counter, are paid for, stuffed in bags, smothered in plastic, sequestered further in a valise, and finally forced into a car trunk. In the hotel room at the Enchanted Hunters, zillions and zillions of Lolitas are reflected in the zillions and zillions of mirrors (*Lolita* 119). Humbert instructs his future book publisher to typeset: “Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita, Lolita. Repeat till the page is full, printer” (*Lolita* 109). Although Lo is capable, like film, of being reproduced, she is, like a nymph, incapable of being caught or pinned down physically. She exists only as a simulacrum, a novel to be printed over and over again.

A cinematic still, a fluttering film, a little ghost on the underside of Humbert’s eyes, Lolita is loved sometimes when she is not Lolita at all, but rather when she is merely a reflection, points of light shining back from a mirror: “For a moment, we were both in the same warm green bath of the mirror that reflected the top of a poplar with us in the sky” (*Lolita* 43). (Again, a poplar witnesses the scene between our nympholept and Lo.) She is always a reflection, always *hazy*, always a simulacrum to what she has been: “What I had madly possessed was not she, but my own creation, another, fanciful Lolita—perhaps, more real than Lolita; overlapping, encasing her; floating between me and her, and having no will, no consciousness—indeed, no life of her own” (*Lolita* 62). Humbert realizes that because of the temporary nature of the nymph, he can never fully possess Lolita; instead, what he actually possessed was a phantom Lo, a cinematic image projected onto his mind’s screen.

Alice Liddell haunted Lewis Carroll “phantomwise,” (*Alice* 260) and likewise, Humbert finds that he can only remember Lolita as “a little ghost in natural colors”

(*Lolita* 11). Thwarted, too, by a photograph of Lolita's prototype, he bemoans that Annabel "did not come out well, caught as she was in the act of bending over her *chocolat glacé*, and her thin bare shoulders and the parting in her hair were about all that could be identified (as I remember that picture) amid the sunny blur into which her lost loveliness graded" (*Lolita* 13). In this novel, whose dominant mode of representation is pictorial, Humbert often tries to capture Lolita visually, even if the vision is merely eidetic.

Although the novel is, in large part, Humbert's attempt to *capture* or *recreate* Lolita through the literary, he also attempts to capture and recreate her visually. Humbert, accustomed to having two types of memory, to dead child brides, and to living in enchanted time, tries to reconcile the present and the future: "I watched, with the stark lucidity of a future recollection (you know—trying to see things as you will remember having seen them)" (*Lolita* 86). Humbert's recollection of Lolita is sometimes whole, but more often it is prismatic, fragmented, incomplete: "Only in the tritest of terms (diary resumed) can I describe Lo's features: I might say her hair is auburn, and her lips as red as licked red candy, the lower one prettily plump—oh, that I were a lady writer who could have her pose naked in a naked light!" (*Lolita* 44). Sometimes, in his movie version, Humbert wonders how it is that he has moved from point A to point B: "I seemed to have shed my clothes and slipped into pajamas with the kind of fantastic instantaneousness which is implied when in a cinematographic scene the process of changing is cut" (*Lolita* 128). Lo may exist as a simulacrum, and her affair with Humbert also exists as such: she kisses Humbert with "a bit of back-fisch foolery in imitation of some simulacrum of fake romance" (*Lolita* 113). In a year, Humbert and Lo take in "one hundred and fifty or two hundred" films (*Lolita* 170). Lo is, as Humbert says, a starlet; she is always acting, always

imitating; she is, in a sense, a creature with animal defenses, that is, the gift of butterfly-like mimicry: “Suddenly all dimples, she beamed sweetly at them, as she never did at my orchideous masculinity; for, in a sense, my Lo was even more scared of the law than I—and when the kind officers pardoned us and servilely we crawled on, her eyelids closed and fluttered as she mimicked limp prostration” (*Lolita* 171). Nabokov’s nymph mimics “limp prostration,” similar to the “limp prostration” a nymph experiences when cocooned before emerging transformed into a butterfly. Humbert says that Lo’s body is “the body of some immortal daemon disguised as a female child” (*Lolita* 139). Humbert refers to the *body* of the girl child but not to her mind or soul; for Humbert, there are two Los:

I should have understood that Lolita had *already* proved to be something quite different from innocent Annabel, and that the nymphean evil breathing through every pore of the fey child that I had prepared for my secret delectation, would make the secrecy impossible, and the delectation lethal. I should have known (by the signs made to me by something in Lolita—the real child Lolita or some haggard angel behind her back) that nothing but pain and horror would result from the expected rapture.

(*Lolita* 125)

Yet, despite Humbert’s ability to engage with enchantment or sink himself into an oblivious nymph-induced rapture, he always seems to sense behind the nymphet, behind the starlet, a real child Lolita.

There have been two American, movie versions of *Lolita*,¹⁰ and perhaps Nabokov glimpsed that his novel may very well be turned into a movie: the girl child Lolita is turned into the novel *Lolita*, transformed in the screenplay *Lolita* (also written by Nabokov), and then transformed once more into the film *Lolita*. Nabokov tells us that Humbert thought, quite briefly, in a post-office in Wace, California, about the possibility of turning his confession into a movie. He even provides directions for a special effect that should be carried out in case this should occur. Among the rows of wanted fugitives—wanted for kidnapping, mail fraud—Humbert says, “If you want to make a movie out of my book, have one of these faces gently melt into my own, while I look” (*Lolita* 222). However, the vision of melting of images, the fusion of Humbert and fugitive, occurs in neither versions of the movie of Humbert’s book. The filmmaker Humbert, always at odds with the poet Humbert, notes that in the post office there is also a “smudgy snapshot of a Missing Girl, age fourteen, wearing brown shoes when last seen, rhymes” (*Lolita* 222). The photograph of the missing girl can be compared to the photographs that Humbert saw on the wall of the office of Camp Q: “photographs of girl-children; some gaudy moth or butterfly, still alive, safely pinned to the wall” (*Lolita* 110). The missing girl children, like butterfly specimens, seem to have been pinned up to die. Humbert realizes that film, although immaterial, possesses a semblance of life that photographs do not: “I could have filmed her! I would have had her now with me,

¹⁰ The first movie version of *Lolita* was released in 1962 and was directed by Stanley Kubrick. The most recent was released in 1997 and directed by Adrian Lyne. Sue Lyon, who played Lolita in the 1962 version, was 14 at the time of the filming; she was 16 when the movie was released and was not allowed to attend the premiere. Even at 14 and 5’3”, Lyon would be considered grotesque and rather un-nymphlike for Humbert, who lusted after the 12-year-old Lolita who stood at 4’11”. (The tallest Lolita ever grows in the novel is 5’0”.) Even so, Lyon was less a giantess than the 5’9” 17-year-old Dominique Swain who played Lo in 1997.

before my eyes, in the projection room of my pain and despair! . . . That I could have had all her strokes, all her enchantments, immortalized in segments of celluloid, makes me moan to-day with frustration. They would have been so much more than the snapshots I burned!" (*Lolita* 231-232). The mimicry show of celluloid seems sufficient for our nympholept. While he burned photographs of Lolita for reasons unknown, he wishes that he had a movie image of her. Perhaps the disjunction between the moving and the static is what separates the two visual fantasies: in the photograph, the subject is already seemingly captured and limp, and in the cinematic image, there is the thrill of the chase, of having to catch and pin down the fluttering image.

In his film-version renderings of his reminiscences of Lolita, Humbert imagines fade-outs, fade-ins, jump cuts, and set changes. Sometimes, traveling through the American wilds, the Haze car is not what moves, but rather the scenery shifts as it does on movie sets. Humbert says, "By putting the geography of the United States in motion, I did my best for hours on end to give her the impression of 'going places,' of rolling on to some definite destination" (*Lolita* 152). Nothing seems to change. Every place is like everywhere else: "Our twentieth Hell's Canyon. Our fiftieth Gateway to something or other *fide*. . . Always the same three old men" (*Lolita* 157). As if foreshadowing her own death, Lolita tells Humbert that "'There is no point in staying anywhere'" (*Lolita* 244). In his cinematographic pan of his surroundings, Humbert also makes use of actual sound and commentative sound.¹¹ When something does not sit right with our leading man, he notes the discord between *seen* and *heard*. When he finds Lo missing at a filling station, Humbert's montage begins with a close-up of mundane, non-Lo objects, a survey of

¹¹ In cinematic studies, "actual sound" is sound that is presumed to come from a source in the film, while "commentative" sound has no known source in a film.

items at the station. We cut to a “bug patiently walking up the inside of the window of the office” before the actual sound begins, when Humbert notices that “[r]adio music was coming from its open door, and because the rhythm was not synchronized with the heave and flutter and other gestures of wind-animated vegetation, one had the impression of an old scenic film living its own life while piano or fiddle followed a line of music quite outside the shivering flower, the swaying branch” (*Lolita* 212). In Humbert’s film-like rendering of memory, we are then supplied with commentative sound: “The sound of Charlotte’s last sob incongruously vibrated through me as, with her dress fluttering athwart the rhythm, Lolita veered from a totally unexpected direction” (*Lolita* 212). Perhaps Humbert finds it necessary to live through enchantment, that is, use movie-land montages, in order to reconcile Lolita’s actual life with the life she could have been living had he never stayed in Ramsdale. Perhaps, too, as the confession is being written in recollection, the movie-metaphor is not invention but remembrance. Whatever its uses or intentions, it is clear that Lo is always, to Humbert, a starlet, a celluloid image wandering through his mind and the American landscape of interstates.

The Enchanter

Just as Annabel Lee was Lolita’s prototype, *Lolita* also had a prototype. Nabokov may have titled *Lolita*’s prototype *The Enchanter*; however, Humbert uses enchantment to entrap his nymphet. He can easily transform himself from man to faun, to spider, to butcher, to murderer, to Arctic explorer, to poet, to Green Goat, to Cubus; he also has the power to transform seemingly mundane surroundings into mythic scenes and Arcadian dales. Humbert uses enchantment to carry out illegal acts on a minor,

specifically kidnapping, drugging, and raping. A department store, in Humbert's mind, contains "a touch of the mythological and the enchanted" (*Lolita* 108) and transforms into a woodland, a sea cavern full of nymphs and fauns. The mannequins are life-sized dolls, frozen by some spell cast by a god, Daphnes locked in trees; they are posed and dressed, motionless, permanently fixed in place and, when compared to the marble statues of ancient Greece, plastic and profane: "I realized I was the only shopper in that rather eerie place where I moved about fishlike, in a glaucous aquarium. I sensed strange thoughts form in the minds of the languid ladies that escorted me from counter to counter, from rock ledge to seaweed, and the belts and the bracelets I chose seemed to fall from siren hands into transparent water" (*Lolita* 108). For Humbert, the visit to the department store is not just a visit to the department store: it is a layover on an enchanted island, full of dead children frozen in time, little ghosts, phantom Los. The shopping bag is not a shopping bag: it is a wave that he must carry over into the next stage of his journey. The sales women are not selling him clothes, but rather, they are Sirens giving him the enchanted gifts he will need to fulfill his next mythical hero's task. Humbert's "dreamy pet," spying the suitcase, the "treasure box" that was "plunged" in the "enchanted mist" of room 342, "walked through dilating space with the lentor of one walking under water or in a flight dream" (*Lolita* 120). She moves phantom-like, dream-like, movie-image-like. When Lo surveys her gifts, Humbert's offerings to his nymph, she holds an "incredible bird" instead of a vest, and a "slow snake of a brilliant belt" (*Lolita* 120). Additionally, Humbert's sleeping pills are not merely sleeping pills, they are "magic ammunition," "amethyst capsules," "tiny plum[s]," "microscopic planetarium[s] with . . . live stardust" (*Lolita* 109), "plump, beautiful colored capsules loaded with

Beauty's Sleep," made of "[s]ummer skies . . . and plums and figs, and the grape-blood of emperors" (*Lolita* 122), and given to him not by the town doctor, but by the mythical witchdoctor. Transforming objects and situations into mythical, enchanted objects and scenes takes the edge off the crime; the enchantment causes Humbert to believe that he is merely acting or fulfilling a fictional character's duties.

As if taken from a scene in a fairytale, in the land of the Enchanted Hunters, everyone is old, ancient, cryptically old, mythically old, and Lo is a "glimmer of nymphet flesh" (*Lolita* 129). An "old-timer cough[s] and deliver[s] himself of some sepulchral mucus" (*Lolita* 127). Humbert hears voices in The Hunters' Hall discuss eternity (*Lolita* 126). The old women in the hotel study roses, and Lo is Humbert's "frail, tanned, tottering, dazed rosedarling" (*Lolita* 122). The Enchanted Hunters, with its old beasts and young darlings, is the perfect setting for Humbert to enchant himself with a fairy tale. Even the movie house in Briceland features this pairing: "a queue of people, mainly children and old men, had already formed before the box office of a movie house, dripping with jewel-fires. 'Oh, I want to see that picture. Let's go right after dinner. Oh, let's!' . . . 'We might,' chanted Humbert—knowing perfectly well, the sly tumescent devil, that by nine, when *his* show began, she would be dead in his arms" (*Lolita* 116). The language of the final segment of their journey to the Enchanted Hunters is couched in the language of fairy tales: "soon after falling under the spell of a nicely graded curve, the travelers became aware of a diamond glow through the mist, then a gleam of lakewater appeared—and there it was, marvelously and inexorably, under spectral trees, at the top of a graveled drive—the pale palace of The Enchanted Hunters" (*Lolita* 117). In early versions of "Sleeping Beauty," also called "Rose Briar," the prince, having

braved the thicket of brush that had enveloped the castle where time had stopped, rapes the sleeping princess. When she wakes, she is with child (Zipes 476). Here, however, *Lolita* is the child, and Humbert dreams of her, encased in sleep, “a completely anesthetized little nude” (*Lolita* 124). He dreams that she is the child Annabel, dead in her sarcophagus, a death as plain, as perfunctory, as harmless as a butterfly’s chrysalis: “my nymphet, my beauty and bride, emprisoned in her crystal sleep” (*Lolita* 123). “Had I been a painter,” says Humbert, “had the management of The Enchanted Hunters lost its mind one summer day and commissioned me to redecorate their dining room with murals of my own making, this is what I might have thought up, let me list some of the fragments” (*Lolita* 134). Humbert then breaks with a colon and begins a new paragraph that he knows will contain “fragments.” Humbert’s chess partner, old Gaston, would always ask Humbert how his girls were (*Lolita* is in a sense a fragmented girl), and Humbert also sees *Lolita* as multiple and fragmented; therefore, he preserves his specimen in this manner—never whole but rather only the bits and pieces.¹²

¹² This is what follows the colon: “There would have been a lake. There would have been an arbor in flame-flower. There would have been nature studies—a tiger pursuing a bird of paradise, a choking snake sheathing whole the flayed trunk of a shoat. There would have been a sultan, his face expressing great agony (belied, as it were, by his molding caress), helping a callypygean slave child to climb a column of onyx. There would have been those luminous globules of gonadal glow that travel up the opalescent sides of juke boxes. There would have been all kinds of camp activities on the part of the intermediate group, Canoeing, Coranting, Combing Curls in the lakeside sun. There would have been poplars, apples, a suburban Sunday. There would have been a fire opal dissolving within a ripple-ringed pool, a last throb, a last dab of color, stinging red, smarting pink, a sigh, a wincing child.”

Humbert knows, even as the trees know, that *there would have been poplars*. In Humbert’s mural, grown women do not cavalcade together, smiling on swings; they are children, and they are “wincing.” The expression of his nympholeptic desires intermingle with predator-and-prey symbolism. That Humbert describes his desire as “those luminous globules of gonadal glow that travel up the opalescent sides of juke boxes” seems humorous here; often, he says a sensation will travel along his back and

As it so happens in fairy tales, in which young maidens are paired with animals, to further the uses of enchantment, Nabokov pairs Lolita, strangely enough, with pigs. Where there is Lolita, there is bacon fat; at the Enchanted Hunters, Humbert notes the “dining room met [them] with a smell of fried fat” (*Lolita* 121). When Humbert sees Lolita for the last time, he notices her “Dolly-smell, with a faint fried addition” (*Lolita* 270). At the Isle of Circe, Odysseus’ men are transformed into swine. At the Isle of Calypso, the enchanting maiden uses a feast of white boars to entrap and keep her weary traveler. “A row of parked cars” at the Enchanted Hunters were, to Humbert, “like pigs at a trough” (*Lolita* 117). The “bald porcine old” (*Lolita* 117) Mr. Swine checks Lo and Hum into the hotel, hands Hum the key to room 342. “[P]ink pig Mr. Swoon” (*Lolita* 139) checks them out of the lodge. Driving through America, they avoid, “despite little Lo’s strident remonstrations, little Lo’s birthplace, in a corn, coal and hog producing area” (*Lolita* 154). One morning, Humbert, after having cast his imaginary spider web all through the Haze house, discovers that Lolita is gone: “And then comes Lolita’s soft sweet chuckle through my half-open door ‘Don’t tell Mother but I’ve eaten *all* your bacon” (*Lolita* 50). Lolita, ravenous, feeding on pig fat, insatiable and sneaky, unable to contain her greed, tempted by rich and greasy food (food that perhaps Big Haze, economical and penny-pinching, did not feed to *her daughter* but only to the *paying lodger*), knows that she has done wrong. Perhaps Nabokov wanted to align Lolita with pigs for their mythic association or to highlight Lolita’s animal (and therefore non-ethereal) nature. Whatever Nabokov’s reasons may be, we see that Lolita’s association with pigs,

then explode. Death is present here, and one can only *glimpse* the last death throes that Humbert must be describing in the last sentence of his Boschian dream, where there is a “last throb” and a “last dab of color” followed by red and pink and a “wincing child.”

because of the pairing of girl children with animals and beasts in fairy tales, adds an element to the uses of enchantment in a novel where our protagonist is bent on transforming his reality into fairy-tale, mythic, and entrancing scenes in order to carry out his schemes.

Lolita the Undine

Nabokov employs the motif of a mermaid, a sea sprite that shares many commonalities with sea nymphs, in order to highlight Lolita's mortality and Humbert's wish to keep Lolita young forever. The mermaid motif, seemingly childlike and innocent, has monstrous connotations beneath. Auerbach argues that the mermaid is "a creature of transformations and mysterious interrelations, able to kill and to regenerate but not to die" (Auerbach 7). Lolita, of course, does die in the novel, but regenerates and lives on through Humbert's voice and *Lolita*, where she is sublimated. Throughout the novel, there are many references to mermaids, and Humbert even cries "merman tears" (*Lolita* 255). For her thirteenth birthday, Humbert buys Lo "a de luxe volume with commercially 'beautiful' illustrations, of Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*" (*Lolita* 174). In *The Annotated Lolita*, Appel informs us that, at the end of *The Little Mermaid*, "the mermaid has been transposed into one of the freely circulating children of the air, who must float for three hundred years before they are admitted into the kingdom of heaven" (Appel 397). She will be given a human soul, if only she chances to marry a human, or so goes the story of the Undine, a water sprite that is sometimes represented in such fairytale-like renderings as *The Little Mermaid*.

Much of undine lore was directly inspired by Theophrastus von Honenheim called Paracelsus, who, in his *Book on Nymphs, Sylphs, Pygmies, and Salamanders, and on the Other Spirits*, written in 1566, explicates the purpose of undines and their desires involving mortality and amorous love. Paracelsus maintained that undines were God's creations, and that they existed to guard the treasures of the sea until these treasures could be used by man. Nymphs, for Paracelsus, were undines:

They come out of their waters to us, make themselves known, act and deal with us, go back to their water, come again—all this to allow man the contemplation of the divine works. Now, they are men, but on the animal side alone, without the soul. From this it follows that they marry men. A water woman takes a man from Adam, and keeps house for him, and gives birth to children. Of the children, we know that they follow after the father. Because the father is a man from Adam, a soul is given to the child, and it becomes like a regular man, who has an eternal soul.

Furthermore, this also is well known and must be considered, that such women also receive souls by becoming married, so that they are saved before God and by God like other women. It has been experienced in many ways that they are not eternal, but when they are bound to men, they become eternal, that is endowed with a soul like man. (Paracelsus 238)

Long ago, sailors, craving the love of women, would imagine sea creatures, mermaids, and undines, but what they were really seeing, so say some historians, were manatees, the scientific name for which is Sirenia.¹³

The undine will be given a human soul, that is, a *mortal* soul, if she marries a human. Sometimes, the undine is Lolita, a little fish, a swimmer; other times, it is Humbert, who oscillates between crying human and merman tears. Likening Lolita's childhood relics to a treasure of the deep sea, Humbert says, "I cherished and adored, and stained with my kisses and merman tears, a pair of old sneakers, a boy's shirt she had worn, some ancient blue jeans I found in the trunk compartment, a crumpled school cap, suchlike wanton treasures" (*Lolita* 255). Greater than the undine's wish to marry is her wish for a human soul; she will trade immortality with mortality for an immortal soul, or what she thinks to be an immortal soul. Humbert, never seeing Lolita as human, but always as a nymph, a sprite, passed into the land of shades and souls, is the human who wishes to marry an undine. She only becomes *mortal* to Humbert when she is married to the very human and deaf Richard F. Schiller. Humbert sees her withering, dying, decaying, shriveling, and he falls in love with this Lolita, this *human* Lolita. He sheds human tears. Lolita, at the novel's end, is granted, through Humbert, immortality, and yet, one wonders about her soul, her soul and her infant's soul, clinging to Gray Star,

¹³ From "Manatees Might Have Been Mermaids" by Whit Gibbons: "This group of solely aquatic mammals, known scientifically as the Sirenia, is unrelated to whales and dolphins. The scientific name comes from the sirens, the mythical sea nymphs who lured lovesick sailors to watery graves, because some historians believe that sailors reporting mermaid sightings actually saw manatees. Indeed, they have no hind legs, and they do have a flipper-like tail vaguely resembling a mermaid's. But they also have a blimp-shaped body and a pair of paddles for front legs. A sailor would have to have been at sea for a long time to mistake a 'sea cow' for anything resembling a beautiful woman with long tresses."

someplace in the air, unable to enter heaven, fluttering about the remotest part of the remotest northwest, her soul forbidden from returning to her nymph-world, her spritely elements, her soul with, as Humbert would say, no place to go.

Conclusion: where *Lolita* is able to go

Lolita is described as “a little ghost in natural colors” (*Lolita* 11), and her very name is “Haze.” Her youth can only exist alongside death, and the newness within her is already tainted. When Humbert realizes that he has exhausted his amours with Lolita, he recalls the first time he took advantage of her and fuses it to his present decaying state. He says that he and Lolita are “in a dismal ex-prairie state, with the wind blowing, and the stars blinking, and the cars, and the bars, and the barmen, and everything soiled, torn, dead” (*Lolita* 185). If the reader is bent on remembering Lolita as the little girl, frolicking in the profane “Riviera” of her backyard in the American Midwest, this reader will do better to remember that the novel begins with Lolita having been pronounced dead, having “died in childbed, giving birth to a stillborn girl, on Christmas Day 1952, in Gray Star, a settlement in the remotest Northwest” (*Lolita* 4). Moreover, this Gray Star is not only in a remote area of the Northwest, it exists in the remotest area, the distance of which, along with the fact that “Gray Star” indeed does not appear in any atlas, transfixes the city forever as an unattainable, mythical place. Humbert would like to “fix” the “borderline” between the “beastly and the beautiful,” but he bought a clock; he bought Lo “a travel clock with a luminous dial” (*Lolita* 141). The clock can only move forward, and Lolita, too, can’t go back in time, although she had talked to Humbert about it: “It was the first time, I think, she spoke spontaneously of her pre-Humbertian childhood;

perhaps, the theatre had taught her that trick” (*Lolita* 219). Humbert could not stop time: “Oh, look, all the nines are changing into the next thousand. When I was a little kid,” she continued unexpectedly, “I used to think they’d stop and go back to nines, if only my mother agreed to put the car in reverse” (*Lolita* 219). Humbert fulfills his ambition to “fix once for all the perilous magic of nymphets”: the “point” of the “beastly and beautiful” is forever transfixed in Lolita’s death. Just as Jove set forever the nymph Dares and her son Arcas in the stars to become the constellations of the Great and Little Bears (Ovid 44), Lolita will be immortalized with her stillborn daughter as Gray Star, a remote point on a mythical map. Nabokov himself forever fixes her within fictional boundaries. The question here concerns Humbert’s nympholepsy and whether this condition justifies the means by which he sublimates Lolita into art, thereby granting her “immortality.” Humbert tells his readers Lolita’s last words to him: “‘Good by-aye!’ she chanted, my American sweet immortal dead love; for she is dead and immortal if you are reading this” (*Lolita* 280). The art, or the novel, could not exist if Lolita were not dead. Although John Ray, Jr. claims that “caretakers of the various cemeteries involved report that no ghosts walk” (*Lolita* 4), the nymphs haunt Humbert’s imaginary island of nymphets. What haunts him more than anything is the remark that Lolita makes to her friend Eva, “You know, what’s so dreadful about dying is that you are completely on your own” (*Lolita* 284). In Hans Christian Anderson’s *Little Mermaid*, the undine, with a human soul, must float around earth, encased in her own lonely orb for 300 years. Although Daphne wishes to play forever and although Humbert wants the nymphs to play around him forever, never growing old, there are no playmates in Gray Star, and Lolita’s voice, unlike Echo’s, is missing forever “from that concord” (*Lolita* 308).

Chapter Two

Adventures in *Under Ground* Deviancies:

Role-play and Fetishes in Lewis-Carroll-Carroll Land

In Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "Little Annie's Ramble," the narrator, who describes himself as a "sage self," fantasizes about giving Annie, whom he refers to as "this giddy child," a book that is about *herself*: "her sweet little self, bound up in silk or morocco with gilt edges, there to remain till she become a woman grown" (Hawthorne 146). In 1864, when Alice Liddell was twelve years old, Lewis Carroll¹⁴ gave her an early Christmas present: *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*.¹⁵ Carroll, realizing for himself the dream that Hawthorne's narrator had of giving a girl child a gift of her literary self, had the book bound in dark morocco leather, as was the fashion of his time. In some instances of literary pedophilia, we see how the nymph figure or girl child is transformed into art, mainly a "book" that, in the absence of the girl child who is long dead (Lolita) or matured (Alice Liddell), lives on, immortalized within the constraints and boundaries that the male pursuer constructs for her. *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* is not merely a gift, but rather it is also a highly eroticized fetish object, a petite and immobile Alice that the actual Alice can voyeuristically make use of in order to espy herself in strange and puzzling situations. What is more, Carroll himself can enjoy that peculiar and particular pleasure of seeing Alice's "sweet little self, bound up in ... morocco" being touched, admired, loved, fondled, and treasured by the real Alice, displaying perhaps the emotions to herself that Carroll would have wanted to display to the real Alice. As the book allows

¹⁴ Born on January 27, 1832, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson adapted the pen name of Lewis Carroll well before he published the *Alice* books.

¹⁵ Although Lewis Carroll did not capitalize "under," all of the scholarship that I have consulted does; therefore, I have also chosen to capitalize it in my study.

Carroll and Alice to fetishize Alice without, however, ultimately possessing the true object of desire (the real Alice), it exists as an *objet petit Alice*. However Carroll might *capture* Alice—in books or photographs or floating in a boat on a summer’s day—there is the undeniable languidness of the girl Alice, an immobility that is latent with sexuality; frozen and posed as she is, these *objets petit Alice* allow or perhaps disallow for a type of possession to take place. As the Alice books, *Alice in Wonderland* (1865)¹⁶ and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), have both been written on extensively, this project focuses mainly on the prototype of *Alice in Wonderland*, *Alice’s Adventures Under Ground*, which was the original book that Carroll painstakingly wrote and illustrated as a gift for his dream child. Aiming to uncover Carroll’s deviant nympholeptic desires, or fetishes, in our contemporary light, I have supplemented this study by analyzing photographs that Carroll took of Alice and other girl children as well as biographical elements and analysis from the prototypical Alice book where pertinent.

The Book as Fetish Object

Henry George Liddell, Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, and his wife Lorina had ten children, and out of those ten children, Alice was the child that Carroll clearly favored. Although some critics are quick to say that such favoritism is mere speculation and lacks evidence, I feel that the evidence—letters written to her, books dedicated to her, as well as many more portraits taken of her than her siblings—supporting such favoritism is overwhelming. Carroll, however, did not meet Alice first. First came little Henry’s acquaintance on March 6, 1856; of this meeting, Carroll wrote in his diary what

¹⁶ *Alice in Wonderland* was actually released towards the end of 1864; however, its publication page bears the date of 1865.

may be considered to be a rarity: a positive aesthetic pronouncement of a male child's physicality.¹⁷ Carroll, after all, preferred the company of prepubescent girls. He wrote that "little Harry Liddell" was "certainly the handsomest boy I ever saw" (*Under Ground* v). Two days later, Carroll met the eldest daughter, Lorina, at a party in the Deanery. It was not until April 25, 1856, however, that Carroll met Alice, who was not quite four years old (Cohen 60). While Carroll occasionally took Henry and Lorina on boating excursions, his visits to the Deanery became more frequent after Carroll's introduction to Alice.

On July 4, 1862, Carroll, while rowing the Liddell sisters on one of their river journeys to picnic, began to tell the story that would become *Alice in Wonderland*. Carroll's favorite girl child at the time, Alice, asked him to write out the story so that she might continue to enjoy it. Because Carroll would take this seemingly simple task and turn it into a serious as well as laborious creative project, it took over two years before Alice would see this story written down. By the time Carroll finished this task, he was no longer on friendly terms with the Liddells, and he had since been unable to see the Liddell children. Like the narrator's dream in "Little Annie's Ramble," Carroll had the ninety-page book bound in morocco leather, and, although his relationship with the Carroll family was strained, he was permitted to present the gift to Alice on November 26, 1864, as an early Christmas present. Carroll, it would seem, was not moved by the idea of merely transcribing the tale: he wanted to create art. He desired to present Alice with more than a story: he wanted to give her the gift of her *self*, presented in such a way

¹⁷ Carroll also wrote in his diaries about his dislike of naked boys: "I confess I do *not* admire naked boys. They always seem to me to need clothes—whereas one hardly sees why the lovely forms of girls should *ever* be covered up" (*Alice* 284).

that would demonstrate the toils, labor, and creative energies he put into her. At the core of nympholepsy is the sudden desire to *create*, a desire that is said to be caused by the nymph; the nymph inspires the nympholept, who often cannot fully possess his temporal nymph, to turn to artifice—a seemingly more permanent capturing of beauty—instead. This turn to artifice, however, often occurs at the cost of the beloved’s physical body: *Lolita* only exists because Lolita has died. Similarly, the Alice books have eclipsed the real Alice or have made a non-entity of her: *Alice* is often the celebrity while those who know anything of Alice are most likely Carrollians, which surely constitute a small segment of the world’s population.

Vladimir Nabokov pinned his nymphet within what for him was the most elusive of specimens, the butterfly; in *Lolita*, we see the fluttering Lo as she transverses space and time, just out of Humbert’s grasp. The fictional Alice not only finds herself in a shifting realm, but she too is a shape-shifter, becoming small or large, physically and even mentally distorted at the whims of her narrator. The Under Ground causes Alice to become confused, forgetful, befuddled, and she questions her identity: she cannot recite simple lessons, she cannot convince the pigeon that she is not a serpent, and as much as she proclaims that she is a little girl, none of the creatures in the Under Ground has any idea just what a little girl might be. As much as Alice wishes to enter the locked garden or find the flustered white rabbit, the reader experiences an Alice that is just as difficult to find or enter. Alice herself is unable to locate herself. In *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture*, James R. Kincaid writes that readers “can, after all, find a way to play with loss, with the elusive and maddening Alice,” and of child characters, he writes that readers “never really want them caged” (*Child-Loving* 298). It would seem then, as

readers, we desire the child precisely because the child is *elusive*, and furthermore, we desire that the child be elusive and remain so. The butterfly is more desirable precisely because it has not yet been captured and pinned. Traditional nymphs are, like Alice and Lolita, shape-shifters, owning the ability to disguise themselves and metamorphose in order to preserve their physical selves. Moreover, like Alice and Lolita, traditional nymphs also possess the quality of elusiveness, making them more desirable to their male pursuers. Because there exists the real Alice in addition to the fictional Alice, there arises the complication of whether or not the reader should conflate the two, especially when dealing with speculative claims about Carroll's intentions or desires. As they metamorphose and evade, both Alices, however, display the traits of nymphs.

Humbert Humbert bemoans the fact that nymphets grow up and that his precious pet will undergo puberty and become, according to Humbert, that most awful of specimens: a college girl (*Lolita* 65). In order to keep Lolita, Humbert creates *Lolita*, thereby entrapping his nymph and allowing her an immortal self; however, this immortality is achieved at the cost of Lolita's physical self. Similarly, the narrator of Hawthorne's story would like to transform Annie into a book so that she may somehow preserve her youth in light of her inevitable transformation into "a woman grown." The narrator would like for her to remain as this "sweet little self" until the transformation to woman takes place, as if to say that he can bear the fact that she will become a woman, yes, but he cannot bear the actual transformative years. He would not like to prevent her entering womanhood, but he would like for her to remain as a "sweet little self" until that time. Likewise, Carroll finds that his *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* might help to assuage the pain of his witnessing Alice grow older as well as provide the real Alice

solace and remembrance of her childhood self in her older years. On the final page of the book Carroll writes:

Then she thought, (in a dream within the dream, as it were,) how this same little Alice would, in the after-time, be herself a grown woman: and how she would keep, through her riper years, the simple and loving heart of her childhood: and how she would gather around her other little children, and make *their*¹⁸ eyes bright and eager with many a wonderful tale, perhaps even with these very adventures of the little Alice of long-ago: and how she would feel with all their simple sorrows, and find a pleasure in all their simple joys, remembering her own child-life, and the happy summer-days. (*Under Ground* 90)

Like Humbert Humbert's imagined island of nymphets, in Carroll's imagined future, there is a flock of children (perhaps all female), and this flock of children surrounds his *objet petit Alice* and therefore can also partake in enjoying Alice without fully possessing her. Like J.M. Barrie's final paragraph in *Peter and Wendy*, which informs readers that Peter Pan courts the future generations of Darling girls forever and ever, Carroll's passage suggests that this fondling of *Alice*, this enjoyment of *Alice*, will go on for generations and generations, long after the present youth have passed away. Along with its nod to old age and death, the book's final message seems less of a token of goodwill and more of a means of entrapment: the message ensures that Alice will always

¹⁸ Where Carroll has underlined, I have italicized.

remember her childhood experiences with Carroll, mainly the summer boat rides and picnics along the riverbank. On the final page of *Through the Looking Glass*, Carroll writes in a poem: “Still she haunts me, phantomwise. / Alice moving under skies / Never seen by waking eyes” (*Alice* 209). As much as Carroll is haunted by Alice, he seems to want to ensure that Alice might also be haunted by him. Not able to preserve his “same little Alice” in actuality, Carroll has made it possible at least to preserve himself in Alice’s memory.

Below this message for the future, Carroll pasted a photograph that he took of Alice when she was seven, an act that works further to ensure that Alice would always reflect upon, admire, and feel tenderness towards her seven-year-old self and perhaps remember herself as Carroll thought of her: “an entirely fascinating seven-year-old maiden” (*Under Ground* ix). In *Ventures into Childland: Victorians, Fairy Tales, and Femininity*, U.C. Knoepfmacher argues that the placement of this particular photograph, showing an Alice aged seven rather than her current twelve-year-old self, was a way for Carroll to ensure that his “private moment of desire” would be “forever frozen”: “The photograph that he placed in a mirror-like oval at the end, however, was that of a girl of seven, and hence exactly the fictional Alice’s age. Decorated with symmetrical festoons that resemble the signs for parentheses as well as the mathematical symbol for infinity, this mirror reflects a face that cannot age” (Knoepfmacher 168). By preserving the moment, Carroll can preserve, however imaginatively, his butterfly specimen. In 1971, Carroll biographer Morton N. Cohen discovered that the photograph had been pasted over a drawing of Alice, the only known surviving drawing of her by Carroll. By covering up his drawing of Alice, Carroll in a sense further entraps and privatizes his nymph in what

Humbert would refer to as her “nymphage” (*Lolita* 66). He keeps for himself this vision of his nymph that he perhaps thought imperfect or not flawless enough to display; he thereby sequesters this vision of her not only from herself but from visitors to the Liddell Deanery, who would have looked through its pages, as well as from future others who would read the facsimile version or perhaps have the rare opportunity of seeing the original book itself. It is obvious that Carroll was trying to copy his drawing from the original photograph, but while the photograph portrays a seemingly carefree child who appears to be thinking of something sly or clever (her mouth seems to be almost smiling or else withholding a smile, an expression that Alice carries in many of the photographs that Carroll took of her), the drawing reveals a child with dark and troubled eyes, pursed lips, and eyebrows that are comically suggestive of anger. She appears to be focusing on some object of hate or anger—not at all the child of “simple joys” with which Carroll leaves his readers.

Under Ground Role-playing

Although shorter than its bigger sister *Alice in Wonderland*, Carroll’s prototype, *Alice’s Adventures Under Ground* also features an Alice who is at odds with her stance as a little girl who suddenly finds herself alone, without friends or family, and navigating the unknowns of negotiating uncharted experiences—experiences that mostly involve questions of being as well as threats to her health and the well-being and lives of the other Under Ground creatures. The child Alice, who must now defend herself and others against death or injustice, leads many readers to ponder just what Alice might be. Should she be classified as child or adult? Kincaid prefers to think of Alice not as a child

but rather as “the false child, the child who betrays by growing up” (*Child-Loving* 289). In the Under Ground, Kincaid asserts that readers find Alice “resisting the play, telling us coldly at every turn in the game that we are being silly, that we must wake up, grow up” (*Child-Loving* 289). I, however, would like to think of Alice not as a *false child*, as Kincaid sees her, but rather as a *false adult*. Like nymphs, Alice is an ambiguous being, both child and adult. She is a child who role-plays at being an adult, and this role-play is necessitated by the new logic that she finds herself having to work through, as well as the fear and uncertainty that this strange and curious new environment brings. Like Wendy, who plays at being both mother and wife in the Home Underground in Neverland, Alice plays at being confident and assertive in order to preserve herself and the other creatures in the Under Ground.

The original setting of the “Under Ground” seems a rather odd choice when contrasted against the published setting of “Wonderland,” a seemingly brighter and more wonderful place than the cryptic “Under Ground,” which suggests graves and crypts, connoting the demonic and deathly. The “Under Ground” suggests a place for death and deviancy rather than a happy-go-lucky place for an afternoon dream to turn into a wondrous adventure. The underground is, after all, where Persephone is taken when Hades abducts her; furthermore, Wendy is regulated to the Home Underground when she is abducted by Peter Pan. Lolita may not have been taken to a literal underground location by Humbert; however, Humbert regularly associates Lolita with dirt, decay, and death. Humbert does, however, kidnap Lo and take her into the underground, alternative, illicit world of incest, rape, cheap motels, and roadside sex. Rather than outright abduction, Carroll places Alice within a dream and further entraps her by then placing

her within a dream in that dream. Even Carroll's punctuation ensures that his nymph is caught there, trapped within parentheses: "(in a dream within a dream, as it were)" (*Under Ground* 90). Alice, however, is not so much moving through this dream, but rather she is being manipulated in a dream that Carroll dreams for her.

For Alice, the dream that takes place in the Under Ground is full of new sensations—everything is "curious," or else gives a "curious feeling" (*Under Ground* 8). Alice soon discovers that fulfilling her desires in the Under Ground is contingent upon what size she is; she learns that she can ingest food and drink to change her size, but she has no knowledge of the outcomes of each bite or swallow. Desperate to reach the locked garden or follow the white rabbit, she takes her chances with the cakes and liquids and mushroom that she comes across. Although Alice may try to act "adult-like" when she encounters other Under Ground creatures by curtsying or asking how-do-they-do, she is, at the bottom of it all, more focused on fulfilling childish desires than with adult concerns such as seeking shelter or finding a way out of the Under Ground. She may be role-playing as adult, but she wants to play in the garden, wants to satisfy her childish curiosities.

In another act that can be likened to sexual deviancy, Carroll seemed to enjoy confining Alice: she is unable to escape the snares in which her new sizes entrap her. Alice suffers many abuses at the hands of her narrator, who seems to enjoy making Alice squirm, struggle, fret, and frown. Of the twenty-seven hand-drawn illustrations of Alice, Carroll shows Alice in some discomfort in thirteen of them: we see Alice sobbing in one, disfigured in seven, drowning in three, alone (when the birds abandon her) in one, and arguing with the Queen of Hearts, who threatens her life, in another illustration. Only

one illustration shows Alice engaged in a decidedly *child*-like act. The illustration shows her *playing*, but this play is not even done by Alice's choice: she has been forced to play croquet or else lose her life. Seven illustrations show an Alice who listens intently to her storyteller; while not *entrapment* in a strict sense, Alice is made to listen and pay attention in much the same way perhaps that she listened to Carroll's storytelling. Carroll, after all, used storytelling and its enchanting qualities as a means of entrapping his girl children. Wendy used her storytelling techniques to keep Peter Pan, and here we see Carroll time and time again using storytelling, even in the fictional realm, to keep Alice entertained and thus within his clutches.

Storytelling, illustrating, and photographing all provided the perfect snares for keeping Alice entertained and thus confined and captured. His art kept little Alice enthralled, in his possession, and at his command. Not only could he pose his nymph, he could also ask her to role-play and keep visual records of this role-playing. Alice, in later life, wrote down her recollections of her time with Carroll and had this to say about visiting him in his rooms:

...we used to sit on the big sofa on each side of him, while he told us stories, illustrating them by pencil or ink drawings as he went along. When we were thoroughly happy and amused at his stories, he used to pose us, and expose the plates before the right mood had passed. He seemed to have an endless store of these fantastical tales, which he made up as he told them, drawing busily on a large sheet of paper all the time.
(Carroll 274-275)

Carroll certainly was using enchantment in order to entrap his nymphs. He used his storytelling talents to enchant the girls, to get them into the mood, as it were, for posing, role-playing, and staying deathly still before the camera. Carroll had a rich and seemingly endless imagination, and his storytelling, coupled with the visual arts, was a sure way to keep his subjects enthralled. Perhaps Carroll was more at ease when he knew that his stories and drawings were not going to be preserved in perpetuity, and it was only when Alice asked for a written record of his Alice story that he painstakingly worked to perfect his techniques; however, Carroll might have been attempting perfection in this feat as he was then no longer on friendly terms with the Liddells and, as a result, had to capture his nymph from afar. In other words, with Alice no longer in his immediate clutches in his rooms in the Old Library, Carroll now had to be as enchanting as ever. Full of memory and sentiment and remorse, *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* is more of a lamenting love letter than a gift of pure entertaining pleasure. In addition to storytelling and drawing, Carroll's photographic art also provides much in the way of enchantment for his girl friends. Alice recalls:

But much more exciting than being photographed was being allowed to go into the dark room, and watch him develop the large glass plates.

What could be more thrilling than to see the negative gradually take shape, as he gently rocked it to and fro in the acid bath? Besides, the dark room was so mysterious, and we felt that any adventure might happen there!

There were all the joys of preparation, anticipation, and realization,

besides the feeling that we were assisting at some secret rite usually reserved for grown-ups! Then there was the additional excitement, after the plates were developed, of seeing what we looked like in a photograph. (Carroll 275)

As Alice and other girl children delighted in the mystery of seeing themselves come into being, Carroll himself must have had a similar pleasure, a voyeuristic thrill at watching his beloveds behold themselves and delighting at their own silvery images coming into existence. What Alice says about the dark room being mysterious and full of potential adventure could easily apply to the underground world in which Carroll later transports her. What is “curious”—to borrow the literary Alice’s favorite description of her new feelings in the Under Ground—about Alice’s description of her experiences in the dark room is the sexuality that lurks underneath her language. Alice says that entrance into the darkroom was a privilege, in that she had to be “allowed” to enter. Carroll “gently rocked” his girl children “to and fro” in a “bath,” which is especially interesting when considering that some of these girl children were nude. Alice experiences feeling sensations that are quite similar to sexual ones: she feels “excited” and “thrilled” with “participation, anticipation, and realization.” More telling is Alice’s feeling that she was partaking in a “secret rite usually reserved for grown-ups.” Intentional or no, Alice’s words do frame the darkroom as an illicit space full of forbidden, tantalizing, ecstatic, and mysterious developments. The darkroom also serves as another confined enclosure in which to entrap his nymphets through the use of enchantment, in this case the

enchantments of watching photographs of their posed and static little girl selves magically develop before their eyes.

Not only did Carroll seem to delight in seeing his girl friends delight in seeing themselves, Carroll seemed to also want to share his entrapped nymphs with others. In addition to circulating other photographs of girl children, Carroll also showed his Alice photographs to others. He displayed them to other potential sitters, inserted them into albums to be perused by visitors to the Liddell Deanery, and gave them as gifts to friends. In *Pleasures Taken: Performances of Sexuality and Loss in Victorian Photographs*, Carol Mavor states that “photography was invented hand-in-hand with our modern conception of childhood. The child and the photograph were commodified, fetishized, developed alongside each other: they were laminated and framed as one” (*Pleasures* 3). One of Carroll’s most famous photographs of Alice, which he called “The Beggar-Maid,” (Nickel Plate 21) depicts her pretending to be a beggar. With one fist on her hip, Alice opens her other hand, quite close to her girl belly, in a gesture that seems to ask for one’s presence or touch rather than one’s loose change. Carroll gave a copy of this portrait,¹⁹ which he further fetishized by framing, cropping, and embellishing with paint, to his friend Alfred Lord Tennyson, who was “so entranced” by the image that he said it was “the most beautiful portrait of a child” (*Under Ground* xii). Alice’s cheeks have been smudged with red paint to make them rosy, a picture of health contrasted against the torn clothing, exposed shoulders, and bare legs. Of “The Beggar-Maid,” Catherine Robson in *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman* writes, “Alice’s revealed flesh, and, much more disturbingly, the knowingness of her appeal to the

¹⁹ This particular copy is currently owned by a Mr. Douglas Smith (*Under Ground* xiii).

viewer, have made it very difficult for most critics to see this simply as a lovely photograph of a seven-year-old girl” (Robson 142). Alice, as if fetishizing her own photograph, does seem to have a knowing look on her face, a taunting and sly, almost flirtatious look that works to embellish the photograph in ways that artifice cannot. The original, unembellished version of this portrait (Nickel Plate 21) shows Alice wearing a torn, white dress with ruffles. Carroll embellished the dress by having the ruffles painted red, suggesting an Alice wearing rose petals instead of fabric, as if his nymph had sprouted from nature. Another version of this embellished photograph (he must have had many made to be given away, having had his miniature Alice lovingly outlined and stroked with paint brushes time and time again) shows only one of Alice’s feet, and this exposed foot has been lovingly traced, each of the little toenails inked over delicately.²⁰ In Tennyson’s gift photograph, however, Carroll has cropped out Alice’s feet—those were for him.

Carroll’s Near-to-the-ground Fetish: Podophilia

While Carroll never took any nude photographs of his dream child, he was able to explore one particular fetish that I do not believe any critic has ever picked up on: podophilia. In addition to posing Alice as a beggar child, Carroll was able to take many photographs of little Alice’s exposed feet in both ordinary dress and in role-play costumes. Today, we might say that our man of the Wonderland had a foot fetish. In *Feet and Footwear: A Cultural Encyclopedia*, Margo DeMello writes:

²⁰ This version is owned by “Mrs. M. J. St. Clair, Courtesy of The Governing Boy of Christ Church, Oxford” (*Pleasures Taken* 36).

. . . during the Victorian era when women's feet were covered in shoes and concealed under long layers of clothing, they were subsequently more eroticized by fetishists (during the mid-nineteenth century there was a busy underground market in foot fetish pornography and accessories), signifying other body parts that were also hidden. In fact, foot and shoe fetishism were first defined as a sexual issue in nineteenth century England, and it may be that these developments were rooted directly in the Victorian morality of the time. (DeMello 127)

Carroll once asked a friend to resend a photograph of his daughter because he did not especially like the way the child's feet had turned out in the photograph; he wanted the photograph "*without her feet!* The artist has managed his lens badly, and has magnified them: no English child ever had such huge feet! I have so often photographed, and drawn, children's feet (generally in their natural beauty . . .) that I speak from experience" (Cohen 150-151). As someone who is interested in Carroll's deviancies, I began to see how he cunningly used his interest in visual arts to beget opportunities to have little girl feet pitter-patter across his photographs and drawings. Carroll once mentioned his "admiration of children's feet" to the mother of two little girls he was photographing, which may have, on second thought, caused Carroll to grow nervous at such an admission. He later wrote to the mother in July 1979:

Dear Mrs. Henderson,

I hope my mention of my admiration of children's feet did not make you think I meant to propose taking *Annie* with bare feet. I shall propose no such thing, as I don't think she knows me well enough, and is also too nervous a child, to like it. So I hope she has heard nothing of it, as it might make her afraid to come.

With children who know me well, and who regard dress as a matter of indifference, I am very glad (when mothers permit) to take them in any amount of undress which is presentable, or even in none (which is more presentable than many forms of undress) but I don't think your Annie is at all a child of that sort. If you ever meet with any such "children of Nature," I shall be glad to hear of them. (*Letters* 345-346)

The letter seems less explanatory and apologetic and more goading: perhaps Carroll thought Mrs. Henderson would, after reading it, feel offended that her "too nervous" Annie was not a "child of Nature" and ask that Carroll try to photograph her daughter naked.²¹ Or perhaps the letter expresses Carroll's discriminating tastes when it came to

²¹ Annie shortly thereafter became a "child of Nature." Less than a week later, Carroll wrote in his diary that "Mrs. Henderson brought Annie and Frances. . . . [I] was agreeably surprised to find they were ready for any amount of undress, and seemed delighted at being allowed to run about naked. It was a great privilege to have such a model as Annie to take: a *very* pretty face, and a good figure" (Cohen 169). Annie's daughter Diana Bannister later had the following story of the afternoon: "Annie and Frances had gone to visit him with their father and spent the afternoon 'dressing up.' They heard him say how much he would like to photograph them in the nude. They promptly hid under the table, which had a cloth nearly reaching to the ground, and emerged with nothing on, much to the amusement of their host" (Cohen 169). Later, Carroll would ask Mrs. Henderson if Annie could sit for a nude drawing with the

separating the girl child of Nature from those he certainly would not want to photograph nude. Humbert Humbert similarly claimed that not all girl children were nymphets.

Nevertheless, the letter is another written admission of Carroll's love for girl feet.

While feet, both bare and not, exist in many of Carroll's photographs, they also exist in *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*, in which there are fifteen illustrations of Alice's feet. Of course, if you are to draw characters, you must draw them with feet if needed, so having simply illustrated Alice's feet is hardly proof of Carroll's podophilia; however, given that we know of his utter delight in girl feet and the pleasure he had in drawing them makes it interesting to see how Alice's feet figure into this literary prototype. Because Carroll struggled with his illustrations, often redoing many of them time and time again, we can be assured that he drew and redrew Alice's feet many times above the fifteen that they appear in the book, giving him delight over and over again. In addition to having drawn Alice's feet, Carroll also pays written attention to them, and they become characters in their own right in the story. While growing taller and taller from having eaten a piece of cake, Alice looks down at her feet and thinks of a fantastical story:²²

“Goodbye, feet!” (for when she looked down at her feet, they seemed almost out of sight, they were getting so far off,) “oh, my poor little feet, I wonder who will put on your shoes and stockings for you now, dears?

I'm sure *I* can't! I shall be a great deal too far off to bother myself about

illustrator Gertrude Thompson present. While Frances was part of these sessions, Carroll's attention was clearly centered on Annie.

²² I have preserved Carroll's use of capitalization in this excerpt.

you: you must manage the best way you can—but I must be kind to them,” thought Alice, “or perhaps they won’t walk the way I want to go! Let me see: I’ll give them a new pair of boots every Christmas.”

And she went on planning to herself how she would manage it: “they must go by the carrier,” she thought, “and how funny it’ll seem, sending presents to one’s own feet! And how odd the directions will look! ALICE’S RIGHT FOOT, ESQ.

THE CARPET,

with ALICE’S LOVE

oh dear! what nonsense I am talking!” (*Under Ground* 11-12)

Our podophile has turned his dream child into a foot fetishist herself. Out of all the things that Alice might be thinking of as her body grows taller and taller, Carroll makes Alice yearn for her feet, which have disappeared out of sight; she feels such sympathy and fondness for them that she wonders about their care and how she might placate them with gifts. Carroll affectionately refers to the feet as “dears,” and one cannot help but wonder if Carroll himself would have liked to step in to fulfill the task of putting on shoes and stockings when Alice is not able. Carroll imagines Alice loving and wanting to comfort her feet. Even Carroll’s penmanship participates in this love of Alice’s feet; there is a departure from Carroll’s standard writing to the carefully written, capital lettering of “ALICE’S RIGHT FOOT, ESQ. / THE CARPET, / with ALICE’S LOVE,” appearing on the page as both urgent notice and verse. “ALICE’S LOVE” stands out so direly and seems to serve as much more than just part of the story; perhaps

Carroll found the coupling of “ALICE” and “LOVE” so delightful to pen or perhaps it represented his years-long effort. Using his storytelling talent, Carroll is able to express his desire, doting, and fondness for Alice, if only through her very precious feet.

A particular illustration of Alice in *Alice’s Adventures Under Ground* shows her in what appears to be an uncomfortable and confined pose (*Under Ground* 37). Carroll has literally trapped her, giving her no room to grow or move, and she fairly squeezes and pulls herself into this space that is too tiny for her expanding body, gathering her skirt up and about her, revealing one tiny foot, her right foot, which pokes into the upper right-hand corner of the drawing. In this drawing, reminiscent of Pre-Raphaelite paintings of maidens with long, flowing, disheveled hair on cramped canvases, Alice is held hostage, captive to both her illustrator and the unfortunate circumstances in which she finds herself, unable to predict or control just how she may shrink or grow. She wonders, “what *will* become of me” (*Under Ground* 36). Nymph-like, she is a mixture of oppositions, ambiguous, a girl and woman squeezed into one. Clutching her dress about her, it appears as if she is either a child trying to conceal what lies hidden underneath or else she is a knowing woman, lifting her skirt in order to display her foot and perhaps more. We are seeing her upside down; her dark eyes stare at us forebodingly and deeply. Her hair, long and dark and wavy, so lovingly drawn, is tousled all about her, a river of Alice hair. (While he may have liked his girls confined, Carroll seemed to like their hair to be unconfined, unkempt, and disheveled.) She appears uncomfortable yet also at ease. Turning the illustration ninety degrees to the right reveals a supine Alice, gathering her knees to her chest. In this pose, she appears both shy and unreserved, giving yet withholding, revealing yet covering herself. Carroll’s illustration makes us ask if Alice is

trying to prevent her skirts from falling over her head and thus reveal her hidden girl parts or if she is gathering them together to do just that. Carroll's illustration may have served to *confine* Alice, but her ambiguous pose also suggests that she has been freed of confinements that dictate what a little girl should do or can and cannot do.

The Pure and the Impure: Alice's Fall

In *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth*, Nina Auerbach writes that Alice is "a figure of simultaneous majesty and abasement in a world seemingly created by the catastrophe of her fall" (Auerbach 167). Auerbach briefly touches on Carroll's illustrations in *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*:

...if we recall the inscrutable sensuality that suffuses Carroll's own illustrations to *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* and his photographs of little girls, we see that the fall brings out a certain perversity within Alice's apparent purity; as the fallen woman animates the mobile child, so juxtaposition with a little girl's apparent innocence should remind us of the spirituality with which the Victorian fallen woman is endowed.
(Auerbach 167)

For Auerbach, Alice's fall through the rabbit hole signifies Alice's fall from purity, from the moral and prudent norms that Victorian women were supposed to uphold. What interests me about Auerbach's insight into Carroll's illustrations is the term "perversity," which opens up new realms to think about Alice's behavior in the Under Ground as well

as about Carroll's placing her there. Auerbach does not explicate *how* Alice is perverse, nor does she give any indication about Carroll's perversity in his writing and illustrating *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*, except to say that the women characters that inhabit it and its counterpart, *Alice's Adventure's in Wonderland*, are "potentially murderous . . . varieties of female fury" that "a pure girl's fall can energize" (Auerbach 167). I would like to argue that part of Alice's perversity is not only her curiosity, which does indeed get the better of her, but also her "potentially murderous" side: she is not the pure girl who has passively fallen in order to restore the murderous intent of other Under Ground female creatures.

Kincaid may insist that Alice is a little adult; however, her perverse desire to fulfill childish curiosities leads to much destruction and harm to the other characters. Without regard to knowing the outcome of her behavior or being able to foretell potential harm or hurt feelings that she may inflict on both herself and other creatures, she is more child than adult. While she sometimes sympathizes with the creatures, she is often quick to voice her dislikes or to act in ways that are rather unsympathetic. As much as Carroll may enjoy seeing his little nymphet in compromising or unpleasant situations, he must have also found pleasure in seeing her act cruelly and destructively. She repeatedly brings up cats to the fear of the one creature, the mouse, who might save her when she is drowning in her own tears. She even goes on to tell the frightened mouse about a dog that kills rats. Although she keeps apologizing for scaring the mouse, she continues to taunt him. An insult from Alice is what sends the mouse, who was in the middle of a tale, away; afterwards, Alice frightens all the birds who have come on shore by telling them how her cat Dinah eats birds. When she has grown quite large in the white rabbit's

house, she takes advantage of her size to scare him. She sticks an arm out of a window in order to try to grab the rabbit; her attempt fails, and she hears breaking glass and screaming, which she seems to delight in, as she does it again and again, to both the white rabbit and his helper Pat (*Under Ground* 40-41). When Bill the lizard is sent to investigate through the chimney, Alice cruelly kicks him up into the air with her foot. Without regard to injury or his life, “she gave one sharp kick, and waited again to see what would happen next” (*Under Ground* 43). After almost killing Bill—she sees that he is in a bad state when she runs away from him and the house—Alice goes on to insult and lose her temper with the caterpillar (who only wants to find out who she is and help her return to her normal size), scare the pigeon by telling it that she eats eggs, and pick a fight with the Queen of Hearts even though the Gryphon has told her that the Queen “never executes nobody” (*Under Ground* 78). Alice seems to delight in her own devised cruelty and unknown outcomes, hardly the innocent child that has been, according to Auerbach, sent to the Under Ground to set off or highlight murderous intent in others. Instead, Alice seems intent on harming others. Of course, it is Carroll who is sadistically at the controls here, delighting his real Alice with the tale of the cruel and uncaring Alice. Carroll realizes that children are entertained by cruelty, that they are not the pure and innocent beings that we might think them to be.

In addition to being cruel and uncaring, Alice is also rather animalistic, more animal than human in the Under Ground: like a feline, she survives the fall through the rabbit hole “not a bit hurt, and jumped on to her feet directly” (*Under Ground* 5). Her rather masochistic propensity to self-injury makes her seem more animal and less human. During her first crying fit, which certainly might categorize her as a child, we learn that

Alice “sometimes scolded herself so severely as to bring tears into her eyes, and once she remembered boxing her own ears for having been unkind to herself in a game of croquet she was playing with herself, for this curious child was very fond of pretending to be two people” (*Under Ground* 9-10). Shortly after this, Alice cries so much, causing a lake to form around her, putting her life in danger. She sees this potential drowning as *punishment* for her behavior (*Under Ground* 17). Whether or not the real Alice was fond of self-injury and self-punishment, we know that the fictional Alice is, having performed violent and painful acts on herself, even while engaged in the very quintessential child’s activity of playing, going so far as to force herself to weep and to beat herself. Whether fetish or deviancy, Alice’s self-injury might be explained by her fondness for role-playing as two people or she may just be the model of Victorian moral norms. The white rabbit also seems to encourage her to role-play by inventing the person of “Mary Ann” that he thinks or wishes Alice to be. The mixture of these “two people”—the deviant and the non-deviant Alice—I think is important when analyzing Alice, the child/adult who is polite/mean and caring/hurtful. She is a barrage of oppositions and totally suited for the nonsensical world in which Carroll has trapped her.

Role-playing on Wet Glass: Carroll’s Photographs

Although the reader comes to realize that the fictional Alice is dreaming at the end of the Alice books, the fictional Alice is not so much moving through a dream, as being manipulated in a dream that someone dreams for her. The real Alice was also manipulated by Carroll, posed and captured in the various poses and guises that he dreamt up for her. Although there is no evidence that Carroll took any nude photographs of Alice, we know

that he preferred to take girls in the nude. In his letters, Carroll writes of a girl of five who “is so perfectly simple and unconscious that it is a matter of entire indifference to her whether she is taken in full dress or nothing” (*Selected* 69). Like Humbert, who wishes to drug his nymphet into a “crystal sleep,” a limp and unconscious state at the Enchanter Hunters Lodge (*Lolita* 123), Carroll seems to also prefer his girl children in a pupa state: unthinking, unmoving, malleable. His nymphs were like his little dolls with whom he enjoyed playing dress-up. In *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination*, Kate Flint points out that “narrative works during the Victorian period, with their mass of particularities invit[ed] identification and exemplification” (Flint 198). However, Carroll’s staged scenes and their intended audiences, who were usually grown male friends and the parents of his child subjects, seem incongruous. Additionally, the Victorians had a love for *tableaux vivantes*; however, Carroll seemed less interested in recreating scenes than he did in inventing opportunities for capturing nymphs in certain poses with certain appendages or skin taking center stage. In *Exposed: The Victorian Nude*, edited by Alison Smith, we can certainly see how many of the female nudes, lacking pubic hair and breasts, seem to be mere children. Carroll, however, did not seem interested in making grown women appear childlike; he was solely interested in the girl child. Carroll seemed to prefer girl feet, sleeping girls, disheveled girls.

Carroll’s love of dress-up and role-playing is complicated, however, by the medium of photography itself, which allows manipulated subjects to become further manipulated through enlargement or reduction of the image, under- or over-exposure of the plates, cropping, and other such devices, tricks or no, that make up the chemical and artistic processes of photography. In addition to employing photographic techniques,

Carroll also embellished his nymphs with paint and, like rare butterfly species, had them mounted in certain albums or framed in order to be given away as gifts. His images were not merely historical or private memorabilia for his sitters to take home, but rather they were meant to be fetishized, precious keepsakes for others to enjoy, touch, stare at, and admire. In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes argues that every photograph, despite its capturing of the seemingly lifelike, contains “the return of the dead” (Barthes 9). He goes on to say that photography “is a kind of primitive theatre, a kind of *Tableau Vivant*, a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead” (Barthes 32). Photography, therefore, seems at odds with the young girls that Carroll wished to capture; the keepsakes it produces seem more like memento mori. For Carroll, who catalogued his girls like rare butterfly specimen on a ledger with their names and birthdays, the photographs, which he had them autograph, were perhaps reminders that his nymphets would someday die and also that they would, like Humbert’s nymphs, someday become women.

On May 11, 1865, Carroll wrote in his diary: “Met Alice and Miss Prickett in the quadrangle: Alice seems changed a good deal, and hardly for the better—probably going through the usual awkward stage of transition” (*Alice* 279). Like the narrator of “Little Annie’s Ramble,” Carroll seems unable to accept the fact that his dream child was in a transitional state, metamorphosing from girl to woman. Carroll did not photograph her at this stage, as he was no longer on speaking terms with the Liddells and, given his opinion of her new looks, he probably would have preferred to photograph one of the many new nymphs in his life. When Carroll was photographing the Liddell children, however, he was still new to both the art of camera work and girl friendships. The

Liddell children, therefore, were Carroll's first specimens in his experiments in capturing both the affection and photographic images of children.

The portraits that Carroll took of the Liddell children seem innocent enough: many were of individual children posing with an object or sitting in a chair, and others were scenes in which dress-up was sometimes used. With a few exceptions, the children's legs, ankles, and feet were not exposed; nevertheless, some of them suggest a sexuality and sensual nature despite the overly dressed and primed Victorian girls.

"Open Your Mouth and Shut Your Eyes" (Nickel Plate 26) is an example of a seemingly innocent photograph with frankly sexual overtones—even Carroll's choice of a title for the photograph sounds as if it could be the title of a contemporary pornographic flick.

Carroll has posed Edith, Lorina, and Alice in a scene where Lorina holds up two cherries for Alice, with eyes closed, to eat. In an expression that appears to be more sensual than pure, Alice's mouth is also slightly open, as she holds up her sister's arm to receive the sexually suggestive fruit. Little Edith, the youngest of the Liddell sisters, sits on a table with a plate of cherries; her socks, unlike those of her sisters, have been rolled down, exposing little-girl calves. Poor Edith is removed from the action, and her downward glance and slightly pouting expression seem to imply that she wishes to do more than merely hold the plate of cherries. In the *Under Ground*, Carroll has the fictional Alice ingest cakes and liquids and mushroom flesh, so it is appropriate that he would choose Alice also to do the ingesting here, even if such ingesting is never fulfilled; the expectation of cherry enjoyment is frozen in time, and, all ecstatic and expectant, Alice forever waits for the fruit to meet her mouth.

Carroll's collection of girls features many feigning sleep, usually lying on a divan or bed. Carroll did take a few photographs of the Liddell girls lying on a divan, and he also took one of Alice pretending to be asleep. Looking at Carroll's sleeping girls, however, I am never certain whether a girl child is supposed to be faking sleep or death. In any event, the girl children seem to have been instructed to role-play at being "unconscious" whether dead or asleep. Taken in 1860, two years after "The Beggar-Maid," "Alice Liddell Feigning Sleep, a Hat by Her Side," (Nickel Plate 24) strikes a curious contrast against the collection of Liddell photographs. It is the only one that shows one of the children sleeping, and this child is, to no surprise, little Alice. Although her feet and ankles are not exposed, she is wearing bobby socks, and we can see her calves and some of her knees. More curious is the fact that Alice is not lying on a divan or bed or couch; while not dreaming in the Under Ground, she has been posed on the ground and feigns sleep on a tarp that has been placed on what appears to be a dirt path. The whole scene looks terribly staged, with a piece of fabric hanging behind her, the unsightly tarp under her, and a hat placed by her belly.

I point to this sleeping Alice as well as to the instances of exposed Liddell children feet, ankles, and legs, because these photographs seem predecessors to the many sleeping and naked nymphs that Carroll would come to photograph over the years. Indeed, Carroll viewed feet, ankles, and legs as precursors to nakedness, often using these body parts to test how comfortable a girl child might be with exposing her skin. Photographing bare feet was the first step towards obtaining what Carroll called a "full front view." I will spend some time here focusing on other photographs of other girl children, because I think analyzing them illuminates the Alice photographs. Additionally,

there is a small amount of scholarship on Carroll's photographs, and I would like to add my analysis to this subject. Discussing the small amount of criticism on Carroll's photographs, Mavor writes:

Very few critics have been willing to touch the little girls Carroll photographed. The subject makes them understandably uneasy. When they do touch upon the topic of his curious photographs, they tend to read not the pictures themselves, or the situation of the girl of the period, but rather Carroll. They want to make it clear that Carroll was not a Humbert Humbert. (*Pleasures* 7-8)

While I am not interested in whether or not Carroll was a pedophile (there has already been too much speculation about it for it make an interesting or unique topic), I will say that he was, like Humbert Humbert, a nympholept, creatively driven by certain bewitching girl children to make visual and literary art. And like the other subjects in my study, Carroll also used enchantment to entrap his nymphets.

Although he took hundreds of nudes and meticulously catalogued them in a ledger, only four of Carroll's nudes survive. He promised the parents of his nude nymphets that he would only make a limited amount of prints and have the negatives destroyed. Carroll apparently made good on this promise, and if any nude photographs were left among his possessions after his death (we do know that he kept a few of each print for himself), they were most likely destroyed by a surviving family member or perhaps his niece Menella Dodgson, who excised and destroyed pages from his journal,

including those following the fall-out with the Liddells, because she did not believe them to be proper (Cohen 100). We know from his letters that he took many “full front view” photographs; however, of the four surviving nudes, only one is a “full front view” of a girl. Of the four, two are of Evelyn Hatch: in one, she sits on the shore of a brook with her legs crossed, and in the other, which is perhaps the most famous of the Carroll nudes, she reclines with her arms crossed behind her head.²³ Another photograph is of Beatrice Hatch seated on a rock in the middle of what appears to be an ocean shore. The last nude is of Annie and Frances Henderson, who are also posed against a rock in an ocean as they role-play at being “castaways.” An artist has embellished all of these photographs, and in the castaway print, the artist painted skirts on the girls to cover part of their nudity.

I wish to discuss Evelyn Hatch’s portrait (Mavor 12) as it is so undeniably sexual, and I see it as the culmination or pinnacle of Carroll’s photographic work with girl children, as if all of his previous efforts were working toward such a goal. It is also a bizarre and disruptive image, an image that begs the viewer to stare precisely because it seems to be made up not of one girl but rather of components of both child and woman. The image, lushly embellished and framed, most likely survived because it was a treasured and fetishized keepsake. Mavor describes the framed image as having “[c]urved glass, caressed with paint, all taboo: this ‘paintograph’ is worthy of serious fetishization” (*Pleasures* 11). Unlike Mavor and Auerbach, I fail to see animalistic qualities

²³ This particular portrait is very rarely reproduced in collections of Carroll’s photographs, and when it is, it is often only reproduced in black and white instead of the full-color flourishes of its hand-painted original. Wikipedia’s collection of public domain prints, however, has a color copy available on-line: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hatch,_Evelyn_%28Lewis_Carroll,_29.07.1879%29.jpg

in this particular portrait of Hatch; however, I agree that the image is one of oppositions and contradictions, and I would like to explore what I see existing there. Little Hatch's body has been transported from Carroll's studio, and her body seems incongruous with the painted idyllic scene of hazy greens and deeper forest green shadows. Her rosy, peach-tinted flesh mirrors the rosy hue behind her that we can take to mean either a sunrise or sunset, against which our little nymph displays her girl breasts and genitals. Despite her youth, the dying sunlight and the forest shadows suggest death rather than a carefree and innocent outing by a young girl.

Unlike some of Carroll's more ambiguous portraits, this one is clearly seductive and, because we cannot look away from its peculiarity, enchanting. Her eyes stare directly at us, and we cannot help but want to meet her gaze, although her girl flesh also demands that we stare instead at it. Disturbingly, Hatch's head, which has been painted a darker tone than the rest of her flesh, seems disconnected from her body, intensifying our stare as we work towards reconciling the two. Mavor argues that her face was perhaps painted a darker shade than her body in an effort to cover up a blush (*Pleasures* 20); however, I think that Hatch looks too much at ease and too serious to be blushing. Furthermore, not all people can blush, and it might be difficult to pick up a blush, even if it was there, on a black and white photograph. Blush or no, the mismatched head signals a type of decapitation, the separating of a girl's identity from her body. Like nymphs whose immortality came only at the cost of their living selves, the portrait of Evelyn Hatch exists at the cost of Evelyn Hatch. While Hatch's body is undeniably girl-like, her head with its mature hairstyle and dark paint is distinctly woman-like. This womanly face is disrupted, however, by Hatch's two little girl arms, which seem grotesquely out of

proportion with not just her head but with her whole self. The seemingly disproportionate arms even appear to be made of a substance other than girl flesh; appearing too short and rubber-like, Hatch's arms suggest doll-parts that have been attached to the wrong girl. Although Mavor sees Evelyn Hatch as a "boyish girl" (*Pleasures* 22), I can only see her as a girl-woman. Even if the girl subject is obvious, this juxtaposition of girl and woman makes us wonder if we are looking at a child or a grown woman. It also makes us wonder whether or not Evelyn Hatch was *intended* to look as sexual, disturbing, taboo, and forbidden as she does. In other words, am I, as a viewer, grossly attributing these characteristics to what Carroll has always maintained was a child at her most innocent and pure? In questioning Carroll, we find that Evelyn Hatch's nude also makes us question ourselves.

Evelyn Hatch's sexuality, because of her nudity and pose, may be quite difficult to disavow; however, many of Carroll's photographs of clothed girls also strike a chord of sexual unease. In a portrait of Irene MacDonald, daughter of the writer George MacDonald, taken at Elm Lodge (Taylor 90) in July of 1863, for instance, we see young Irene, who was six or seven years old, lying on a cushion and a long pelt of animal fur that has been draped on the floor, a long river of what appears to be cheetah or leopard skin. This association with the beastly should make our little Irene somewhat animalistic, but she remains timid, unsure, looking slightly shy and uncomfortable. Her face also carries an expression that seems to be either slightly pained or ecstatic. Her bobby socks and short white skirt, which appears to be a nightgown based on its thinness, reveal a little girl knee and little girl legs. A richly embellished sheet is partially draped over her torso, so we wonder if, underneath, her girl nipples and chest are unclothed. A lock of

Irene's hair is placed where the gown's shoulder strap *might* reside; her hair, another one of Carroll's fetishes, keeps our stare and our wonder, withholding our answer. (Mavor seems to know with certainty that Irene is naked from the waist up, but as a viewer, I simply cannot tell whether she is or not.) This question of whether or not her nightgown has been pulled down to her waist, the expression on her face, and her pose make her seem less like the innocent and pure child who has been woken from a dream and more like a girl who is in a state of sexual arousal or ecstasy. She stares directly at the camera, as if at her lover.

Another arresting image of Irene MacDonald, taken at the same time, was titled "It Won't Come Smooth" (Taylor 88). Carroll took a number of portraits of girl children with disheveled hair, and in this photograph, Irene's hair is frizzy and uncontained, probably as a result of brushing out her naturally curly hair. The expression on her face is one of pained indifference. Posed with one chair behind her and another to her side, she holds a mirror in one hand, a brush in another. Her feet are bare and she wears a white nightgown. The frizzy and unkempt hair and the white nightgown, buttoned up to the neck, make for incongruous subjects, suggesting that the girl child we see here is somewhat unruly and untamed. Furthermore, the picture's caption suggests that despite persistence and using the correct tools, Irene is incapable of becoming tame. Perhaps the animal skin in the previously discussed photograph works to similar effect: there, we see that despite the reclining girl's tameness, she is enveloped in a latent wildness and unruliness, which perhaps signal that Irene possesses the potential to be more abrasive and rough and less smooth and gentle.

It seems as if Carroll, who portrays the fictional Alice as selfish and impolite at times, preferred his girls a little on the rough side. In a letter written to a girl named Agnes Argles, Carroll asks Agnes if she liked the book he had given her, that he forgot the name, but he thinks “it was about ‘malice’” (*Selected* 38). He liked them sleepy, drowsy or, as in the case of Florence Maude Terry role-playing as a rag-wearing Cinderella (Nickel Plate 18), looking slightly possessed. Sometimes, as in the case of Alexandra “Xie” Kitchin, he liked them so tiny that they were like little dolls. In fact, Carroll named one of his photographs of her “The Prettiest Doll in the World” (Nickel Plate 20), a line taken from Rev. Charles Kingsley’s poem “The Lost Doll.” Of course, little Xie, who was among the tiniest girls that Carroll photographed, stands with her tiny, almost-infant feet exposed. She wears a sleeveless dress that has had holes cut into it to mimic the clothing of the poor. Here, Xie role-plays at being a child of the working-class, and to further the metaphor of brokenness and things being torn, the photograph has been embellished with a border that suggests that we are looking at Xie through a cut hole or a sear that has been left after a burn. The prettiest doll in the world has to be spied on through a fissure in order to be seen, and she is not wearing such pretty clothes after all. Xie is often dreaming. She sat for Carroll over fifty times over the period of eleven years, beginning at age four (*Collected* 576). In an untitled photograph (Nickel Plate 42), she lies on a divan, feigning sleep in a short white dress that appears to have innocently slipped off of her shoulders. Her exposed feet reveal one very white and long toenail. In “Rosy Dreams and Slumbers Light” (Nickel Plate 43), she sleeps in what appears to be a rather simple, working-class bed. In “Sleepless” (Nickel Plate 44), she is awake, staring off to the side. In “Penitence” (Nickel Plate 48),

she is backed into a corner, the hem of her long white nightgown grazing her bare feet, her hands clasped at her waist, looking possessed and punished and certainly penitent.

As if pinning and mounting a butterfly, Carroll fetishized Xie's smallness by marking her height on his door, where he marked other nymphs. Like Humbert who thinks of the clothing he buys for Lolita as "phantom little Lolitas" (*Lolita* 108), Carroll had phantom girls pinned to his doorframe. He wrote to another child-friend, Gertrude Chataway: "If I had thought of it while you were here, I would have marked you against my door, where I have Xie's height marked, and other little friends. Please tell me your exact height (without your shoes), and I will mark it now" (*Collected* 261). In a letter to Xie, Carroll pleads with her to stay tiny: "I'm afraid it'll be another 6 weeks or so before I can invite you to bring Dorothy to my studio. *She* won't have grown too tall by that time: but I very much fear *you* will. *Please* don't grow any taller, if you can help it, till I've had time to photograph you again. Cartes like this (it always happens if people get too tall) never look really nice, as a general rule" (*Collected* 370). Jokingly, Carroll drew a photograph, or "carte," showing a too-tall Xie with her head lopped off just above her nostrils in an act that works as another symbolic decapitation, suggesting that once too tall, the subject would be of little use to Carroll. Despite Carroll's joking attitude, one senses a seriousness about his desire to photograph only very young and petite girl children. Although she began tiny, Xie, like Wendy, could not stay little forever, and therefore at eleven, she was no longer a photographic subject for Carroll's album of girls. Unlike Alice, she had no elixir that might shrink her so that she could reenter Carroll's enchanted garden.

Tired of Alice

Towards the end of his life, Carroll, supposedly disenchanted with the new techniques in photography and weary of carting around his photographic equipment, put his camera away and instead used his old age as a means of entrapping nymphs. Toward the end of her life, the real Alice was known to have told her son Caryl Hargreaves²⁴ that she was “tired of being Alice in Wonderland” (*Under Ground* 27). While she might have been able to separate her real self from her fictional self for most of her life, as Alice approached death, she found herself living in a world that demanded that the two come together. At the end, *Alice* did come at the cost of Alice. In 1880, Alice married Reginald Hargreaves at the age of 28, and her private, little, leather-bound book was made public in 1886. A year earlier, when Alice was thirty-three years old, Carroll wrote to Alice to inquire whether or not she would be in favor of publishing a facsimile edition of the book he had given her when she was just a girl, beginning the letter with endearing yet haunting words: “I fancy this will come to you almost like a voice from the dead, after so many years of silence, but my mental picture is still as vivid as ever of one who was, through so many years, my ideal child-friend” (*Under Ground* xxv). And so, even her private *Alice* story and memorabilia were no longer solely hers, having been made public. As he did with every manufactured *Alice* object and book, Carroll sent an inscribed copy to Alice. Having died in 1898 at the age of 65 from bronchial pneumonia, Carroll would not live to see the centenary celebration of his life and work at Columbia University in 1932. Alice, however, would. At eighty years old, she was invited to cross

²⁴ Alice Liddell had three sons, Alan, Leopold, and Caryl. Alan and Leopold were killed in the World War I.

the Atlantic to attend the celebrations, where she was treated as a celebrity. Alice found herself being treated as *Alice*.

As readers of the *Alice* books and viewers of the Alice photographs, we are continually faced with the disruption of having the real and fictional Alices meet. Through his creative endeavors, Carroll made it possible for others to commodify and fetishize Alice. Certainly, a contemporary reader will have been exposed to Disney's marketing of their Alice cartoon and the numerous items that can be bought with Alice, the Mad Hatter, the Cheshire Cat, and other Wonderland creatures embellishing them. The *Alice* story continues to inspire and enchant, and the most recent reincarnation, an "animated film," was released in 2010. Carroll, in his time, also contributed to such commercial endeavors with *Alice*. Of course, there were the *Alice* books and later the facsimile edition of *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*, but he was also behind the creation of an Alice biscuit tin²⁵ and later devised what he called "The Wonderland Postage Stamp Case,"²⁶ a true fetish object in terms of its delightfully enchanting visual tricks as well as its intended use to contain keepsakes. Additionally, in an act that further miniaturizes and confines his nymph, in 1890 he

²⁵ In *The Nineteenth-Century Child and Consumer Culture*, edited by Dennis Denisoff, Mavor notes the absence of food in many of Carroll's photographs and writings, claiming a literary anorexia as well as an actual anorexia in Carroll's life. She writes in her essay, "For-getting to Eat: Alice's Mouthing Metonymy," that Carroll felt "unease at the idea of endorsing a brand of biscuits. But perhaps his actual unease was with the biscuits themselves" (Denisoff 103). She also notes that Carroll sent the tins out to child friends without including biscuits. Perhaps Carroll reserved the biscuits for himself and visitors to the Deanery, or perhaps he wanted the focus of his gift to be on the Alice drawings and not the biscuits.

²⁶ The stamp case also included a pamphlet that Carroll wrote entitled "Eight or Nine Wise Words about Letter-Writing." Cohen writes that Carroll "designed the stamp case himself. Drawings of Alice appear on the case and the cover, and the case produces two neat tricks. When one pulls it out from the cover, the cover picture of Alice holding the Duchess's baby is replaced by one of her holding the pig; likewise, on the back the entire Cheshire Cat is replaced by the residual grin. The case, when unfolded, contains slots for various denominations of postage stamps" (Cohen 491).

published *The Nursery Alice*, a simpler and shorter version of the *Alice* books intended for younger children who could not yet read the *Alice* books.

Carroll shared *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* with George MacDonald and others, and, by having given a copy to Alice, the book was picked up and fingered by visitors to the Deanery, who freely felt the pages and fondled the leather skin. Toward the end of her life, having no resources to keep up with the expenses of Cuffnells, the Hargreaves' family home, Alice, too, had to sell her literary self. In 1928, when she was seventy-five, the original *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* sold for £15,000 to A.S.W. Rosenbach at an auction held by Sotheby's (*Under Ground* xxvi). The book continued to circulate, as the buyer soon resold the book to a collector, Eldridge Johnson. When Johnson died, the book was put up for auction once more, and again it was bought by Rosenbach for \$50,000. Later, the book was returned to England by a group of wealthy benefactors, and it still resides in the British Museum where endless visitors continue to ogle *Alice* (*Under Ground* xxviii).

Despite the very public, wide-spread, and enduring circulation of the *Alice* books and the continued fetishization and commercialization of its characters, and despite the massive amount of scholarship in Carrollian studies, Lewis Carroll and his relationship to the real Alice remain mysterious and fascinating, an enchanting subject in its own right, as scholars work to tell themselves the stories that they envision behind the pair. Evasive and ambiguous, thwarting our desires, our *objet petit Alice* continues to enthrall, bewitch, enchant, and delight alongside speculations about the mysterious circumstances that ended the relationship between Carroll and his most cherished child friend. While Alice may have been sick of being *Alice*, scholars and non-scholars both continue to be fascinated by the two Alices. Instead of knowledge fulfilling our desires, the more we learn or speculate, the more "curiouser and curiouser" (*Under Ground* 11) we become. In

Lolita, Humbert Humbert, envisioning an “enchanted island haunted” (*Lolita* 16) by his nymphets, thinks of “mirrory beaches,” a trope for his solipsism: the beaches are totally secluded, haunted rather than inhabited. Similarly, the moment in which Carroll most possessed his nymph—not on an island, but rather confined in a boat and entrapped by his enchanting story—he remembers the “mirror” of the surface of the river. Traditional nymphs are associated with a water source, and both *Lolita* and *Alice* follow this tradition. *Lolita* was lying under a sprinkler when Humbert first espies her. *Alice*, when Carroll invented *Alice*, was floating in a boat on a river during a rain storm; *Alice* finds herself immersed in a pool of her own tears. In an article written for *The Theatre* in 1887, Carroll recalls the day he came up with his *Alice* story: “Stand forth, then, from the shadowy past, ‘Alice,’ the child of my dreams. Full many a year has slipped away, since that ‘golden afternoon’ that gave thee birth, but I can call it up almost as clearly as if it were yesterday—the cloudless blue above, the watery mirror below, the boat drifting idly on its way” (*Alice* 281). *Alice*, then, is only a figment of Carroll’s imagination, a child not of his reality but rather of his imagination. The “watery mirror,” like Humbert’s “mirrory beaches,” serves as a signal to Carroll’s lone, solipsistic world in which he carried on with girl child friends and the keepsakes that he, bemoaning that they grew up, adored and cherished to record his time with them. He seems to conflate the real and fictional *Alices* when he says that he gave birth to his dream child, a birth that would come at the cost of the girl child *Alice*, who would be eclipsed by her fictional self. Like Humbert, who can conjure *Lolita* in his imagination as “a little ghost in natural colors” (*Lolita* 11), Carroll admits to being able to recall the scene with his nymph “almost as clearly as if it were yesterday.” Carroll also tells us in the ending poem to *Through the*

Looking Glass that like nymphs who have had to die in order to preserve themselves, Alice is “[n]ever seen by waking eyes” (*Alice* 209); Alice can only exist then as a little ghost in black and white or in the unnatural colors and dimensions of having her image cropped and painted. Just as *Lolita* is already dead at the onset of *Lolita*, Carroll tells us that the moment has already passed, is already dead, was in fact dead when it first happened: the ending poem informs us that “Autumn frosts have slain July” and the dream was dreamt “as the summers die” (*Alice* 209). From the moment of that possession, Alice, like *Lolita* and traditional nymphs, ceased being Alice and became the immortal *Alice*. Alice could only then exist as a phantom, haunting Carroll’s boat ride and photograph albums, where the ghostly girls, fetishized and commodified, do not live but rather are frozen in time, immobilized, embalmed, apparitions of their youth and girlhoods.

Chapter Three

“not merely because of the unknown that was stalking toward them”²⁷:

The Performance and Play of Sexuality, Growing Older, and Death

in J.M. Barrie’s *Peter and Wendy*

In J.M. Barrie’s *Peter and Wendy*, certain conventional elements of Victorian domesticity, womanhood, and mothering are *known* to Wendy: sewing, cooking, putting children to bed, darning socks, making pockets, applying poultices and bandages to wounds. However, there are many *unknowns* that loom over her—growing up, growing older, and dying—both on the island of Neverland²⁸ and in the nursery of the Darling home. The distinctions between the make-believe and the real are sometimes, but not often, apparent to the children on Neverland. Throughout *Peter and Wendy*, the novel counterpart to the play *Peter Pan*, Barrie consistently blurs these distinctions, which center, in my view, on the uses and abuses of fantasy. In *The Uses of Enchantment* Bruno Bettelheim argues that fantasy aids the child in assimilating various developmental experiences, traumatic or otherwise, involved in maturation and the achievement of sexual identity. Similarly, in *Peter and Wendy*, we see how fantasy is a potentially dangerous tool that Wendy uses to transcend childhood or play and enter womanhood. It is through the performance of or the engagement in playing “house,” specifically a Victorian household, with Peter that Wendy comes to experience the unknowns of being a grown-up woman. Through performance and play, Wendy gains knowledge of her

²⁷ Barrie, J.M. *Peter Pan* (Mineola: Dover, 1999): *Of course she should have roused the children at once; not merely because of the unknown that was stalking toward them, but because it was no longer good for them to sleep on a rock grown chilly* (72).

²⁸ In the novel *Peter and Wendy* “Neverland” is one word, while in the play *Peter Pan* it is two words: “Never land.” Because my study centers primarily on the novel, I have chosen “Neverland.”

sexuality and impending womanhood, a knowledge that helps her navigate the unknowns through make-believe experiences. My chapter is not, however, concerned with the Freudian view that might suggest that Wendy is merely playing house with Peter to fulfill her wish of being a grown-up, nor am I concerned with how Wendy's play with Peter might imitate Mrs. Darling's behavior as mother and wife. I am more interested in how Barrie portrays Wendy as a girl child who quickly erases the line between real and pretend and the implications of this erasure. While James Kincaid in *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* refers to Peter's and Wendy's interactions as "inconsequential play" (Kincaid 283), I think the "play" has serious consequences for Wendy, who seems to have fallen in love, for the first time, with a being that is neither wholly real nor wholly pretend. While playing at being mother and wife, Barrie places Wendy in situations where she ironically trespasses into subversive sexuality; although she is playing conventional roles, Barrie brings Wendy prematurely into contact with sexuality, violence, and the knowledge that certain kinds of experiences, and life itself, will end.

Barrie posits Neverland as a place of play and pretend, a world aligned with the imagination; however, the performance of death and sexuality on the island often trespasses into the real. In her essay "Little Angels, Little Monsters: Keeping Childhood Innocent" in *Six Myths of Our Time*, Marina Warner writes:

In the very midst of consecrating innocence, the modern mythology of childhood ascribes to children a specially rampant natural appetite for all kinds of transgressive pleasures, including above all the sadomasochistic

thrills of fear. And these child heroes—and—heroines—now enjoy a monopoly on all kinds of unruly passions which adults later have to learn to control in themselves. (*Six Myths* 52)

Neverland inscribes the place where the Darling children come into contact with these “transgressive pleasures” precisely because, on the island, real and pretend become so indistinguishable that at times pretend meals could be served for days instead of real meals. In addition to meals taking on a blurred boundary between reality and fantasy, relationships and roles also assume unclear distinctions. Peter needs reminding that he is not really married to Wendy and that the other children on the island are not really their children. Wendy, who has come to believe fully in the make-believe, answers him, “[b]ut they are ours, Peter, yours and mine” (*Peter and Wendy* 91).

In order to analyze fully how Barrie portrays Peter Pan, this paper will study three texts: the novel *Peter and Wendy*, the play *Peter Pan*, and the novel *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*. While looking to three sources that compete and conflict with one another at times might seem an unusual approach, I find that in a chapter that aims to uncover the psychological underpinnings of its two main subjects, Peter and Wendy, it is helpful to have a full case history, however disparate, in order to evaluate the roles in which Barrie puts his subjects. *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, first published in 1906, was excerpted from *The Little White Bird*, which was published in 1902. *The Little White Bird* is where Peter Pan made his first appearance in the works of Barrie. *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* is wholly contained in *The Little White Bird*, which also contains beginning and ending chapters that center on a boy named David, who no doubt is George Davies, Barrie’s

favorite Davies boy. (The Davies boys were sons of Sylvia and Peter Davies. Barrie spent much time, indeed too much time according to Peter Davies, with Sylvia and her boys.) Barrie wrote the play *Peter Pan* in 1904 and later wrote the novel *Peter and Wendy* in 1911. Unlike his cocky and selfish character in *Peter and Wendy* and *Peter Pan*, in *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, Peter is portrayed as gentler, sincerer, and ignorant about the world. He is kind and aims to please. Peter and Wendy display similar attitudes in both *Peter and Wendy* as well as *Peter Pan*; however, the novel and the play depart from one another at times in terms of plot and dialogue. Where significant to my study, I have analyzed these differences in this chapter.

My project aims to dispel two popular views of Peter: one, that he is asexual or androgynous even, and two, that he is representative of eternal youth. Contrary to M. Joy Morse's argument in "Female Sexuality and Power in J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*" that "[a]s Peter has been created incapable of sexuality, Wendy's allure for him is limited to her maternal traits, and her efforts are therefore predestined to fail" (Tarr 298), it is my contention that Peter *is* capable of sexuality; he is, however, incapable of fidelity. Nor does he view Wendy as strictly maternal. Kincaid writes that, "Peter is youth and joy,²⁹ and [Wendy] is age and death" (Kincaid 286). I think that we ought to reverse these oppositions and see that it is Peter who, "clad in skeleton leaves and the juices that ooze out of trees," (*Peter and Wendy* 9) is the true figure of age and death. In the play *Peter Pan*, we learn that Peter, "[i]n so far as he is dressed at all it is in autumn leaves and cobwebs" (*Peter Pan* 97). Not only does Peter come to Wendy naked, he comes to her cloaked in symbols of decay. Autumn leaves, like the skeleton leaves, suggest decay rather than

²⁹ This quote is in response to Peter's response to Hook when asked "Pan, who and what art thou?" Peter answers: "I'm youth, I'm joy" (*Peter and Wendy* 131).

youth, and skeleton leaves, of course, suggest death and a stage well pass decay. Cobwebs, rather than suggesting “youth and joy,” seem to suggest that Peter has just risen from a crypt. Humbert Humbert refers to himself as a spider (*Lolita* 54) because of his self-perceived patient entrapment of his nymphet; indeed, he even envisions long silken spider web strands in which he could trap Lolita all through the Haze household. Peter visits the Darling nursery dressed in cobwebs, and his appearance has much to do with entrapment and also much to do with a little girl. Rather than standing for potential decay or the threat of adulthood, Wendy is, in my contention and contrary to Kincaid, “youth and joy.” It is precisely because Peter lacks real youth and joy that he must seek it in Wendy, and if not in Wendy, then in Wendy’s progeny. Peter may indeed be youthful, but his youthfulness does not exist outside of Neverland: it is a youthfulness that can only exist in exile.

It is my contention that Peter, despite being dubbed “the little boy who wouldn’t grow up,” is neither fully child nor adult. He is called a “betwixt-and-between” several times in the novel and almost exclusively so in *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, and this seems to me a term that more accurately describes him. I would also like to resist reading “betwixt-and-between” as existing between two gender or sexuality poles: Peter is not, as some critics have cast him, androgynous. Nor do I see Peter as a feminine, homosexual “fairy” as Carol Mavor, in “Nesting: the Boyish Labor of J.M. Barrie” pins him (*Reading Boyishly* 174). Contrary to Mavor’s argument, I think that in order to give Peter an accurate interpretation, it is best to read him as the play and novel would have him: as a little, naked boy, and not as the grown, waif-like woman that he is often cast as on-stage. As a betwixt-and-between, Peter exists between two poles of being: not only

does he never have to grow up (at least physically), but he apparently also never dies. We know that he has lived at least since Mrs. Darling was a girl, and we know that he continues to live well after Mrs. Darling's great-granddaughters have daughters.

Although Peter does meet with real rather than pretend violence on the island and repeatedly faces the real possibility of death, he apparently always escapes, always lives, and is always the one who kills rather than the one who is killed.

It is precisely Wendy's ability to mother as well as her youth and perhaps sexual attractiveness that make her Peter's mate of choice. While looking for a mate who is gifted in the domestic arts may strike contemporary readers as being either old-fashioned or emasculating, running a top-notch Victorian household with the help of wife was seen as a masculine conquest to the Victorians: according to John Tosh in *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*, a neat and efficient domestic sphere was a sign of manhood (Tosh 2), and Peter, who had to be the best at everything, was no different from other Victorian men. Wendy's desire to mother, however, is far from traditional: her desire to mother is entangled with her rebelliousness and subversive sexuality. She is, after all, a runaway; she is, after all, sleeping with Peter in his bed. And although she serves as a reverse Persephone of sorts, she, unlike Persephone, looks forward to being taken by her male captor for her annual spring cleanings. In *Literature and the Child*, Holt McGavran writes that Peter "refuse[s] the demands of the patriarchal, heterosexual domestication" (McGavran 138) of Wendy and the Darling household, and this is why Peter refuses in the end to stay on in the nursery with the other Lost Boys; however, it is my view that Peter, like a good Victorian husband, adores domesticity and playing at husband and father. He sometimes just *forgets* that he is playing these roles.

Peter is also not afraid of these roles: he simply does not want to play these roles with a grown-up woman or a girl who will, outside of Neverland, turn into a grown-up. I am interested in studying the various roles that Wendy nevertheless performs in her attempts to have Peter ask her a question on a “very sweet subject” (*Peter and Wendy* 144) and how this make-believe often teeters between play and perversion.

Two is the Beginning of the End

At the onset of *Peter and Wendy*, Wendy Darling learns “that she must grow up” (*Peter and Wendy* 1). Wendy’s realization is spurred by playing in her family’s garden, and her use of fantasy helps her to realize her own mortality. While playing, Wendy “plucked another flower” (*Peter and Wendy* 1). Mrs. Darling wants Wendy to be forever just as she is: two years old. The *other* flower here may have to do with Wendy’s age—one flower for each year—yet it also seems to suggest replacement and, because of the act of severing the otherwise passive flower and thus ending its life, trespassing and theft. Barrie ends the first paragraph of the novel with “[t]wo is the beginning of the end.” The *end* here can be read as not only the end of the obliviousness of one’s death and one’s infancy but also quite literally the end of one’s life. “Two” can be read as age, but it can also be read as coupling, reproducing: once there is “another flower,” then the original one can be discarded in favor of the new one. That “two” should be the beginning of the end is something that Wendy also learns through Peter. Wendy and Peter couple as two singles that have conjoined, however briefly, in Neverland. This coupling, however, also marks the beginning of the end. Although Wendy is a young girl with no experience in romantic love, she is quickly smitten with Peter and wishes to

make a husband of him right away. However, as soon as she wishes to be Peter's wife, Peter evades her. He quite literally drifts on clouds.

Wendy's coupling with Peter, however, is always threatened by another. She is never *the one*; there are, in Peter's love life, always two or more than two. Even Wendy's first encounter with Peter is shadowed by another. In this case, the other woman is her mother, who was, in her youth, Peter's darling. As if she had her own secret and strange motives, Mrs. Darling keeps Peter's shadow hostage, causing Peter to tarry too long in the Darling nursery and wake the sleeping Wendy. Within the shadow of her mother's love for Peter, a speck of light looms threateningly in the nursery—the light of Tinkerbell, who also wishes to yet cannot make a husband of Peter. For Wendy, being one of two or more women is the beginning of the end of ever realizing her romantic vision of a life with Peter. When there are more than one, when there are two, the love affair sours for Wendy, who must always remain suspicious of the other woman. Two women, two flowers, mark the end of a rather short-lived romanticism that Wendy may have maintained about herself and Peter. Wendy knows that she will grow up; the flower also reveals to her, in a manner similar to Gerard Manly Hopkins's Margaret³⁰ seeing the “unleaving” of Goldengrove, that she must not only grow up but that she will also one day die. Peter can always pluck another girl child to replace the previous girl child: in so doing, he too, like Wendy, must realize something about finitude.

³⁰ In the poem “Spring and Fall, to a Young Child.”

Wendy and the Boys in Bear-suits

That Wendy is relentless and nevertheless pursues Peter also marks a rebellious streak in Wendy. She after all does not mind at times being the other woman and remaining faithful to Peter despite knowing outright about his various affairs. This fierce pursuit is usually undertaken by Pan, who relentlessly chases nymphs until they metamorphose or sublimate into the landscape, often at the cost of their bodies or life: they would rather remain virginal and die than live and be possessed by Pan. That the girl Wendy is taking on a role that is traditionally held by the lusty, old goat Pan is another sign of her subversive nature.

Wendy, I feel, has been mistakenly interpreted as prude and a do-gooder. She ruins the fun: she dispels the island play when she instigates the end of the children's Neverland life and the return home. She makes sure that the children on the island eat rather than play and dictates bedtimes and rules at meal times. She is, in a word, the proper English middle-class girl. As proper as she may *seem*, however, Wendy is, like other nymphs, an ambiguous figure; she is the mixture of the proper and the transgressive. In "Babes in Boy-Land: J. M. Barrie and the Edwardian Girl," Christine Roth explores how Wendy teeters between two identities; she is a "middle-class girl" who "is also a liminal figure who, in some ways, marks the boundaries between the various landscapes and tempestuous borderlands" or "neverlands" in the Peter Pan stories (Tarr 56-57). Although they may vary, Neverland is always, writes Barrie, an island, and every child has a respective, imagined Neverland. Moreover, Neverland is played at by day but becomes more real at night: "When you play at it by day with the chairs and the tablecloth, it is not in the least alarming, but in the two minutes before you

go to sleep it becomes very nearly real” (*Peter and Wendy* 6). Wendy’s “tempestuous borderland” or Neverland “had a pet wolf forsaken by its parents” (*Peter and Wendy* 6). That Wendy would imagine a pet wolf in her Neverland betrays her animalistic, bestial, and transgressive desires. She does not, after all, imagine what might be considered “girlie.” Instead of such girlie delights as ponies and baby dolls, Wendy’s Neverland is inhabited by the beastly and animalistic. She dreams of a Neverland with a wolf, and not just any wolf, but one that she imagines herself mothering and caring for: the wolf, like Peter and the Lost Boys, has been abandoned, and Wendy must become a mother to it. The wolf, I think, is aligned with Peter, who not only tried to return home to his mother only to discover that another boy was sleeping in his bed, but who also becomes, in a sense, Wendy’s pet, a wild thing that must be tamed. Although Wendy teeters between girl and woman, daughter and wife, on Neverland, she becomes Peter’s caretaker and more strongly role-plays as Peter’s wife on the island.

The animalistic, abandoned-wolf-like nature of Peter is furthered by the fact that “Wendy’s mind began to be scrawled all over with him” (*Peter and Wendy* 6). That is what Mrs. Darling discovers when she travels through her children’s minds. While Michael and John showed a sign of Peter “here and there,” Wendy’s mind was “scrawled all over with him.” Scrawling usually denotes a writing that is not neat but rather hurried or messy; Peter, whom we later learn does not know how to read,³¹ seems to be rather poor at penmanship as well. Bad penmanship, often referred to as “chicken scratch” and associated with illiteracy, mark Peter as somewhat less civilized, a being that is less

³¹ Peter knew how to read in *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*. He read notes from Maimie Mannerling and was even able to write on the tombstones or grave markers of the children he buried. It seems as if Peter “forgot” how to read, which is not surprising, considering that Peter is forgetful.

human, more animal, a betwixt-and-between. That Wendy's very mind was writ all over by the uncivilized Peter suggests the obvious connotations of possession and witchery and also points to a theme that is central in the works of this study, that of the male creator, or nympholept, who literally *writes* the female, thereby possessing her and, like the nymph Echo, allowing her to speak only through the voice of the male author. The multi-layered scrawling on Wendy's mind—that by Peter and ultimately by Barrie—suggests not only physical and mental possession of the girl Wendy, but also a type of unwanted intrusion, a mental molestation: Peter deposits animalistic writing in Wendy. Wendy is not even safe from her mother, whose invasion of Wendy's mind is the event that allows the reader to learn what was writ there. What is deposited there leads to the birthing of the animal: a wolf with no mother awaits Wendy on the island. Wendy's desire to meet her pet wolf may have maternal sources, but it also seems to spring from the carnal. Unlike Lewis Carroll's Alice in *Alice in Wonderland*, who is disgusted when she discovers that the baby she is coddling is actually a pig, Wendy very much wishes to attend to the abandoned wolf. It is the very idea of mothering an animal rather than a human child that excites Wendy—another mark of her transgressive nature.

Does Wendy tame the wild boy Peter, or does the wild boy Peter tame her?

Warner argues that Bettelheim's theory, in which "children need to compensate for their own hapless dependence by imagining themselves huge and powerful and cruel has also normalized all manner of frightening play-acting, equating children with monsters, childhood with a savage state" (*Six Myths* 52). She also points out biologist Stephen Jay Gould's assertion that society's strange coupling of children with beasts comes not from the inherent state of children, but rather from "some idea of shared primitiveness—and

future extinction” (*Six Myths* 52). Barrie couples Wendy with the savage Pan and a host of boys in bear-suits. The Boys may be children in bear suits, but are they for Wendy to tame, or do they tame Wendy? Although Roth places much emphasis on how the proper, English, middle-class girl Wendy tames the savage Lost Boys (Tarr 55), I think it interesting to think of Wendy as the savage who is tamed by the Lost Boys. In ancient Greece, prepubescent girls went to the sanctuary of Artemis to become little bears.³² They romped naked and play-acted as bears before they returned home, a ritual that was seen to prepare them for marriage. It is not clear to me whether the ritual tamed them by exhausting the beastly in them or by allowing them to make their beastly natures more pronounced; however, in a novel that takes an ancient Greek trickster, Pan, as its central character, we cannot ignore the bizarre image of little boys in bear-suits and the significance of the prepubescent Wendy being sent to live with bears before she returns home and eventually gets married. In what is called the “Afterthought” to the play *Peter Pan*, titled “When Wendy Grew Up,”³³ we learn that she marries one of the Lost Boys,

³² In *Ancient Greek Religion*, Jon D. Mikalson writes, “Once every four years Athenian girls between the ages of, probably, ten and fourteen went to this sanctuary [the sanctuary of Artemis], and, as part of the ritual of the festival, wore saffron-colored dresses and ‘played-the-bear,’ a ritual called the *Arkteia* (*arktos* = ‘bear’ in Greek” (Mikalson 62). Mikalson also includes the myth that gave rise to the ritual:

A she-bear once was given to the sanctuary of Artemis and was tamed. Once a maiden was playing with the bear, and the bear scratched out her eyes. The girl’s brother(s), in grief for her, killed the bear. And then a famine befell the Athenians. The Athenians inquired at the Oracle of Delphi as to its cause, and Apollo revealed that Artemis was angry at them for the killing of the bear, and as punishment and to appease her every Athenian girl, before marriage, must “play the bear” for Artemis. And so the Athenians voted that an Athenian girl was not to live with a man until she “played the bear” for Artemis in Brauron. (Mikalson 62)

³³ This scene, titled “An Afterthought,” was only performed once during Barrie’s lifetime on the “last night of the 1908 season” (*Peter Pan* vii).

although which one she marries is not revealed.³⁴ Nonetheless, she marries a man who was once a bear-child. Of course, she would have much preferred to marry Peter, but Peter refuses to ask her that question on a “very sweet subject” (*Peter and Wendy* 144).

Thimbling

Although Wendy and Peter engage in very adult behavior on the island, it helps to look into their first encounter in order to see how quickly their relationship progresses. Their relationship begins with what might appear to be a childish exchange, one that is almost euphemistic rather than physical or actual. Thimbles are interchangeable for kisses, as are acorn buttons; however, kisses are also interchangeable for kisses. After Peter apologizes for having been so cocky (actually crowing in pride) after attaching his shadow to himself (when it was actually Wendy who sewed it back on), Wendy still withdraws from Peter. Craftily, Peter lures Wendy out of her bed covers by saying, “in a voice that no woman has ever yet been able to resist, ‘Wendy, one girl is more use than twenty boys’” (*Peter and Wendy* 22). Barrie writes that Wendy “was every inch a woman” (*Peter and Wendy* 22), and because she is a woman, she is unable to resist Peter and “peeped out of the bed-clothes” (*Peter and Wendy* 22). Peter, it seems to me, plays directly to Wendy’s sexuality, and Wendy, because she is a sexual being, responds appropriately. Rather than describing Wendy as desexualized, I think we should think of

³⁴ Roth writes that, according to *Peter Pan’s* epilogue “When Wendy Grew Up,” Wendy marries Slightly (Tarr 59). I have read the epilogue over and over looking for the evidence of this marriage. Wendy tells her daughter about the Lost Boys: “Most of the boys married their favourite heroines in fiction and Slightly married a lady of title and so he became a lord.” Her daughter Jane then says, “And one of them married Wendy and so he became my Papa!” (*Peter Pan* 160), indicating that Slightly was *not* the Lost Boy that Wendy married.

her as merely inexperienced. She possesses sexuality; she just has not had, until Peter, situations in which to experiment with her sexuality. Peeping out of her “bed-clothes” signals the moment when Wendy metaphorically peeps out of her sexless world and into the highly sexually charged world that is Peter Pan. Quickly at work fulfilling her desires or satisfying her sexual curiosities, Wendy responds to Peter’s flattery by saying that Peter is “sweet” and that she would like to return the sweetness by giving Peter a kiss:

. . . but Peter did not know what she meant, and he held out his hand expectantly.

“Surely you know what a kiss is?” she asked, aghast.

“I shall know when you give it to me,” he replied stiffly, and not to hurt his feelings she gave him a thimble.

“Now,” said he, “shall I give you a kiss?” and she replied with a slight primness, “if you please.” She made herself rather cheap by inclining her face toward him, but he merely dropped an acorn button in her hand, so she slowly returned her face to where it had been before, and said nicely that she would wear his kiss on the chain round her neck. (*Peter and Wendy* 23)

Morse argues that Peter’s offering to return Wendy’s thimble, rather than giving her a real kiss, signals Peter’s ignorance of male-female physically, and that the return further threatens to strip Wendy of her sexuality (Tarr 297). Peter’s desire for Wendy, Morse contends, is due to Wendy’s being a desexualized mother: “By bringing Wendy, who

represents the potential of future maternal power, into Neverland, Peter creates the possibility of attaining the maternal bond for which he longs, but free of adult sexuality” (Tarr 297). To me, the scene is charged with Wendy’s sexuality, and Peter’s aloofness should not be interpreted as ignorance. Peter, it should be remembered, is the “cunning” one. He knows exactly how to manipulate the girl Wendy, as is further evidenced in the abduction scene, which I will discuss later in this chapter. Before there was even any talk of “thimbling,” which, because one inserts a finger into a thimble, suggests “fingering,” Wendy was in bed with her blankets prudishly pulled up over her head, refusing to show herself to Peter Pan. Peter somehow managed to get Wendy not only to remove the covers but also to sit next to his naked self on her bed. Although Morse admits that the thimble serves as a vaginal image, she argues that the thimble is “an image that, although innocently domestic, carries implications of which Peter appears unaware. The thimble, once an open-ended metal sheath, not only evokes the shape of a wedding ring, but also serves as a vaginal image, recalling female sexual power” (Tarr 297-298). If we can agree that the thimble is so overtly sexually charged as to make its meaning obvious, then we should at least entertain the notion that Peter knew *exactly* what it was that Wendy was offering him. Conversely, there has been so much talk of this thimble-vagina-kiss in the criticism of *Peter and Wendy* that the significance of Peter’s “kiss”—the button—has been overlooked. If the thimble can be sexualized, then surely the button must also serve as a sexual symbol, specifically of the clitoris, that one female “button” that is, ironically, overlooked in these critics’ considerations of female sexual points and pleasure. It is no surprise then that the “button” is lost amidst the discussions of the “thimble.”

Pan and Peter Pan

We can think of Peter Pan as the diminutive form of Pan, the lusty old goat who drove nymphs to death or metamorphosis. He may be “Peter” Pan, but he is still Pan. Mrs. Darling explains to Wendy “in quite a matter-of-fact way that she thought Peter sometimes came to the nursery in the night and sat on the foot of her bed and played on his pipes to her. Unfortunately she never woke, so she did not know how she knew, she just knew” (*Peter and Wendy* 7). Barrie gives Peter Pan one of Pan’s most telling attributes—that of playing on pipes. The sound of Pan’s playing must have had a foreboding quality to it: Pan fashioned his pipes out of river reeds, into which the nymph Syrinx metamorphosed in order to escape Pan and preserve her virginity. Additionally, the goat alliance figures prominently in *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, which chronicles Peter’s adventures before meeting Wendy. A hook that Barrie uses in this novel to keep readers interested is the mention of a goat, early in the story; the patient reader will learn how Peter acquired this goat. At the novel’s end, we learn that it was Maimie Mannerling, Peter’s first love (and more on that later), who gave the goat to Peter. It was a toy goat, which the “wicked” Maimie liked to use to scare her brother (*Kensington Gardens* 59). Later, the fairies in Kensington Gardens transformed the toy goat into a real one. Barrie closes his hook at the novel’s end: “so that is how Peter got the goat on which he now rides round the Gardens every night playing sublimely on his pipe” (*Kensington Gardens* 64). Not only does Peter play on pipes in *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, but he is more closely conflated with Pan by the introduction of a real, live goat, which he uses to patrol the gardens for dead or near-dying children in need of burial or

shelter from the cold. At the beginning of *Peter and Wendy*, Peter mentions his former life in the Gardens; however, he conveniently neglects to tell Wendy about Maimie Mannerling, whom he thimble before her.

Peter Pan's close alignment with the mythological Pan is obvious, and yet it has not been made into a critical discussion point about Peter. We are all too happy to accept Peter as our cultural consciousness has made him—a boy who will not grow up—and not as the lusty nympholept that he more closely resembles. Kincaid writes that “the adult...tries to wriggles into various forms and habitations, including that of the playful child” (Kincaid 276). Accordingly, I think it useful to envision Peter as Pan in a Peter body, a being who is old and decaying but betrays this decay by embodying a boy's body. (Interestingly, we can also think of Barrie embodying the “playful child” in order to navigate the underground realms of domesticity with the little girl Wendy while surrounded by his bear-boys and other playmates.) I am curious why Barrie chose to characterize his child hero in the figure of Pan. In “Pan and *Puer Aeternus*: Aestheticism and the Spirit of the Age,” Jean Perrot writes:

...the major watershed in nineteenth-century children's literature occurred with the introduction of a new type of character: the child-hero, inspired by the mythological figure of the Greek god Pan. This change coincided with a different concept of the text, that is, as the product of an unreliable double-talking narrator, whose account or descriptions are studded with references to some underground psychological or mythological “reality.” Barely perceptible in the works of Charles Kingsley and restricted to

Christian myth in those of Charles Dickens, where the child is Christ and a means for the writer to reorganize elements of his own autobiography, the new attitude was grounded in a resolutely pagan mood in the very heyday of the Victorian golden age of children's literature. The mythical figure of Pan offered a vision of mankind's archetypal communion with Nature and an escape from the representation of historically determined individualism. (Perrot 155)

Admittedly, Barrie does fill some of the prescriptions that Perrot puts forth, namely using the hero-child to navigate elements of his autobiography. In Barrie's biography, *J. M. Barrie and the Lost Boys: The Love Story that Gave Birth to Peter Pan*, Andrew Birkin spends as much time desexualizing Barrie's relationships with both children and young women as he does on relaying events in Barrie's life; however, Barrie's horror of marriage, his affinity with children, and his interest in young, fecund women, especially if they could role-play (i.e. actresses), is central to the biography and raises interesting questions concerning Barrie's use of a hero-child to explore these autobiographical elements.

Secondly, we should consider whether or not *Peter and Wendy* uses "an unreliable double-talking narrator, whose account or descriptions are studded with references to some underground psychological or mythological 'reality.'" We can probe the underground realities before moving on to the investigation of a "double-talking narrator." Of course, Neverland is the most prominent underground reality in the text, but childhood and adulthood can also be seen as alternate realities. The text is sprinkled with suggestions that childhood and adulthood are at odds with one another and,

moreover, that adulthood signifies a kind of dying, whereas childhood contains elements of the eternal, which adulthood threatens to take away. Both childhood and adulthood, although they do exist in reality, take on mythological realities in the text: both are different types of make-believe and utilize their own rules within their games.

Adulthood as game is evident in an early scene with Mr. Darling, in which he relates all the various duties as the good Victorian husband that he needs to fulfill in order to keep his brood alive and well: “unless this tie is round my neck we don’t go out to dinner to-night, and if I don’t go out to dinner to-night, I never go to the office again, and if I don’t go to the office again, you and I starve, and our children will be flung into the streets” (*Peter and Wendy* 13). Of course, Mrs. Darling saves her brood by tying Mr. Darling’s tie properly. Her “housewife” abilities save the day and prevent the destitution of her family. No one is really threatened by Mr. Darling’s tie: yet somehow, Mr. Darling’s adult mind is able to make-believe that his tie can affect future events.

The most significant “underground” world, however, alluded to at the novel’s onset and throughout, is quite literally the underground; death figures prominently in the story, and it is through play that Wendy acquires knowledge of death. At the outset of the novel, Wendy, through play, learns that not only will she grow up, but that she will also die. Wendy’s use of fantasy helps her realize her own mortality. Strangely, this alternative world of death is more evident in childhood and Neverland than it is in adulthood. Although we know at the novel’s end that Peter fetches the future Darling girls, Barrie does not emphasize their deaths. The exception is Mrs. Darling’s death; after the birth of Wendy’s daughter Jane, we learn that “Mrs. Darling was now dead and forgotten” (*Peter and Wendy* 148). Although we learn about Mrs. Darling’s death and

Wendy's growing up, we do not exactly learn the darker side of Peter Pan's treatment of them, namely, that he prefers them little. Barrie presents the line of Darling women more as an eternal chain of girls than as generational beings who are born and then die. "Children," Barrie writes, are able to "have the strangest adventures without being troubled by them. For instance, they may remember to mention a week after the event happened, that when they were in the wood they met their dead father and had a game with him" (*Peter and Wendy* 7). Even before setting foot on Neverland, the children witness the real death of a pirate. Wendy is confronted with death right away when she is shot down. Pirates suffer bloody deaths, and when Hook dies, the children watch him get devoured by the crocodile. The most famous line of the novel is perhaps Peter's thoughts on the underground world of death when he is confronted by the very real possibility of drowning: "To die will be an awfully big adventure" (*Peter and Wendy* 82). In order to hide from pirates who wish to kill them, the children literally live in a home underground.

Wendy keeps house in what can be interpreted as a grave or crypt, housing beings that are both human and beast. As mentioned earlier, a detail in *Peter and Wendy* that often gets eclipsed in performances and animated representations is the fact that Peter demanded that his Lost Boys clothe themselves in bear-suits made from bears that they themselves killed. Wendy's role-playing as mother and wife exists alongside eternal decay rather than youth. Wendy, we later learn when the honeymoon is almost over, is sometimes kept underground for whole weeks (*Peter and Wendy* 65). The children may represent eternal youthfulness, but they are enclosed within the clutches of death and decay. They are allowed eternal youth precisely because they are both preserved by and

buried in the island. Wendy may be role-playing at being a young bride; however, her domesticity is marked by the Home Underground, a home that is crypt-like and invoking decay and death, rather than a proper Victorian home. Wendy, through the uses or abuses of fantasy, is allowed to role-play at being both mother and wife; however, the knowledge that she gains through such role-playing is hardly the bliss that she might have expected from such roles.

To more fully investigate whether or not *Peter and Wendy* represents what may be, according to Perrot, “a vision of mankind’s archetypal communion with Nature and an escape from the representation of historically determined individualism,” we need to ask if Barrie’s narrator is indeed a “double-talking” one. That is, does the narrator of *Peter and Wendy* intend to deceive us, and if so, how and why? Although the narrator uses strictly clear syntax and never befuddles with jargon, he does seem to deceive through his light-hearted treatment of certain scenes, mainly those involving death, submission, and those grayer areas where play seems to pass into perversion. The double-talk here seems to be contingent on the fact that the text is intended to be read by children or by parents to their children. In other words, the deception may have less to do with tricking characters or even the reader and more to do with glossing over those perverse or sinister moments in the text that might keep the book from being read as a children’s book.

Abduction

Wendy’s rebellious streak and her desire to mother are evident in what I like to call the abduction scene in the novel. In an Adam and Eve or, perhaps more

appropriately, Humbertian move of “it was she who seduced me,” (*Lolita* 132) Barrie too claims that the girl Wendy is the temptress. It is initially Wendy’s storytelling that draws Peter to her in the first place. After Peter reveals himself to her, Wendy tells him the story of Cinderella. After the story, Peter gets up to go. Wendy, like a little English Scheherazade, implores Peter not to go: ““Don’t go, Peter,’ she entreated, ‘I know such lots of stories’” (*Peter and Wendy* 27). Barrie then writes, “Those were her precise words, so there can be no denying that it was she who first tempted him” (*Peter and Wendy* 27). Regardless of who was tempting whom, the scene quickly verges on a kidnapping. Peter returns to Wendy, but he is changed: “He came back, and there was a greedy look in his eyes now which ought to have alarmed her, but did not” (*Peter and Wendy* 27). This apparent shift in his expression is the first of many that Wendy witnesses: here the look is one of greed, but later she will witness madness, bloodlust, and utter loss of anything recognizably *Peter*. The look *should* have scared Wendy, but it did not; Wendy, despite the sense of danger, continues to converse with Peter; it is almost as if she is welcoming danger and an opportunity to rebel. We could say that Wendy’s fascination and romantic inclinations towards Peter make it easy for her to be manipulated into going. However, we can also say that she went willingly: Barrie does not make the distinction clear here. As in a classic abduction, “Peter gripped her and began to draw her toward the window” (*Peter and Wendy* 27). Wendy protests and orders him to let her go. When Peter learns that force is not the way to kidnap Wendy, he lures her with his own brand of candy: he promises that he will teach her how to fly, that she will be able to say “funny things to the stars” (*Peter and Wendy* 27), and that she will see mermaids on the island. Moreover, Peter promises Wendy that should she go; all the boys, he promises, would respect her.

The issue of respect, of course, suggests the contrary (that they might *not* respect her) and raises issues about Wendy's body and the sanctity of that body: Wendy, as a girl living among boys, would be respected, not violated, disobeyed, or disregarded. After these promises, we learn that Wendy "was wriggling her body in distress. It was quite as if she were trying to remain on the nursery floor" (*Peter and Wendy* 28). Barrie places Wendy in a position that suggests demonic possession, a scene that is overwrought with sexuality: a girl on a floor writhing with desire, trying to fight that desire.

The abduction, however, is not complete until Peter promises that Wendy, like a proper Victorian woman, can be a mother to him and the Lost Boys. She can resist the more typical little-girl lure of a mermaid, but she is unable to resist the lure of playing grown-up. That Wendy and Peter both want to keep each other is clear—they both use their cunning in an attempt to get the other to do as they wish: in Wendy's case, she wishes for Peter to remain in the Darling home and tempts him with stories, while Peter wishes for Wendy to leave her parents' home and go with him to Neverland and tempts her with mermaids and mothering. They both want domesticity, it would seem; however, Wendy would like for the domesticity to exist within the realm of the real, not the imagined Neverland, even if it is a place formed in her dreams and therefore all the more alluring. During the abduction scene, we must remember that Peter "had no pity for her" (*Peter and Wendy* 29). A devilish greed underlies his actions, something that Wendy senses, but does not fully discover until later. His desire for Wendy is wholly selfish, and Wendy's best interests are not taken into account. Perhaps it was Wendy's

eagerness to fetch her housewife³⁵ and her adeptness at sewing his shadow back to him that make Peter realize that Wendy would be unable to resist playing at being a “housewife”:

“Wendy,” he said, the sly one, “you could tuck us in at night.”

“Oo!”

“None of us has ever been tucked in at night.”

“Oo,” and her arms went out to him.

“And you could darn our clothes, and make pockets for us. None of us has any pockets.” (*Peter and Wendy* 28)

That Wendy would want to do anything with boys at night showcases her desire to misbehave and betrays her properness. None of the Lost Boys, including Peter, have been tucked in at night, making Wendy their first. She will *devirginize*³⁶ the boys’ *untuckedness*. The idea of tucking the boys in at night elicits a vocal response from Wendy, one that is suggestive of ecstasy, especially as it comes immediately after her floor-wriggling episode.

The idea of being the *first* one to tuck in the Boys elicits yet another “Oo” from Wendy, and with this second vocalization, Wendy makes a physical advance. Her arms

³⁵ The “housewife” is typically a box for holding sewing notions: thread, a thimble, a small scissors, buttons, and other notions that may be used when making a quick fix by hand.

³⁶ I’m not sure if there exists a word that means to undo one’s virginity that does not carry with it some notion of being defiled or spoiled. It is my contention that although Wendy “takes away” the Lost Boys’ untucked-in virginity that this act isn’t necessarily one that spoils the boys or deflowers them negatively.

go “out to him,” a gesture that is unclear: it could suggest that she is opening her arms for him to enter her embrace, or that she has moved to embrace him. Regardless, the response is more adult-like than girl-like, and it also suggests the physicality of lovers. It also further marks Wendy’s uninhibited physical nature: just as she was the first to “thimble” Peter, here we can also see that she has no qualms about being the physical aggressor. Peter also lures her by saying that she will have the opportunity to use her housewife on the island. Not only will she be able to darn clothes and repair hems, she will also make them pockets, a not-so-subtle vaginal enclosure that, if Peter means trouser pockets, also happens to rest close to their crotches. It makes sense that the boys do not have pockets: they do not have any women on the island (at least any proper, civilized, middle-class English women), and they do not have any women on the island to make them pockets. (The mermaids wear no clothes, Tiger Lily hardly wears any clothes, and Tinkerbell only wears a skeleton leaf.) They will have their first pockets because of Wendy. Again, Wendy is tempted at the idea of making them pockets: she will *devirginize* their *pocketlessness* in addition to their *untuckedness*. It is clear that Wendy did not leave her parents by force: she chose to go, and she went less for the mermaids and more for the Boys.

Peter’s First Playmate

Wendy crosses over into more adult realities through her “play” with Peter, and Peter learned about female-male love through playing with Maimie Mannering in Kensington Gardens. In this exchange, we see Peter in a different role from the one he plays in Neverland. In Neverland, he functions as Wendy’s first lover and heartbreaker:

he refuses to give Wendy fidelity and a long-term commitment. However, in Kensington Gardens, he is smitten with Maimie, who refuses to stay with Peter, preferring instead to return home, where her mother waits and where the mortal children are. Although this study concerns *Peter and Wendy*, I think it is useful to see how Peter's history can shed light on his relationship with Wendy—that is, if we think of his time in Kensington Gardens as part of his make-up. It is a history that is overlooked in Peter Pan studies, especially considerations of how his relationship with Maimie affects his sexual development.

What we learn about Peter's time in Kensington Gardens is that one of his occupations completely aligned him with decay: he was a gravedigger. He buried babies and children who had fallen out of their perambulators or were left out in the cold. He had, as in *Peter and Wendy*, a host of fairies, but he also lived among birds. The bird Solomon said that Peter was a "Betwixt-and-Between," half human and half bird. Peter played about with the fairies, slept in a nest, mourned that his mother had barred the window, and dreamt of being a real boy. Although Peter is "always the same age," the narrator says that "Peter is ever so old" (*Kensington Gardens* 12), an admission that is not as explicit in *Peter and Wendy*. We see several prototypes to the events in *Peter and Wendy*. The kite that saves Wendy from drowning finds its original in the kite in Kensington Gardens that Peter loved "because it had belonged to a real boy" (*Kensington Gardens* 20). The nest that saves Peter from drowning finds its prototype in the many nests of *Kensington Gardens*—there is a nest that Peter sleeps in and one that he uses as a riverboat. The bear-suits in *Peter and Wendy* have a small beginning in *Kensington Gardens*, where we learn of a chimney-sweep named Sooty "who had killed a good many bears" (*Kensington*

Gardens 6). Wendy's "darling" house sees its first in the house that Peter and the fairies of Kensington Gardens build around Maimie. Finally, of course, there are the fairies, which figure prominently in both texts.

Perhaps the most important prototypes of *Kensington Gardens* are Maimie, who is in a sense Wendy's prototype, and the thimble kisses, which have more eroticism in Kensington Gardens. Wendy's rebellious streak is marked by innocent curiosity, while Maimie seems to be the darker version of Wendy, a girl who sometimes was bad, knew she was being bad, and delighted in her transgressions. Barrie places much emphasis on Maimie's "strangeness" and her almost love of the dark, and in so doing, eroticizes her while suggesting that Maimie was inclined to disobedience: "Maimie was always rather a strange girl, and it was at night that she was strange" (*Kensington Gardens* 41). Moreover, she was fearless in the dark: "The reason she felt no more fear was that it was now night-time, and in the dark, you remember, Maimie was rather strange" (*Kensington Gardens* 47). Maimie enjoyed torturing her brother with her toy goat; she even tells Peter "of the wicked thing she did in the dark to frighten [her brother Tony] (she knew quite well that it was wicked)" (*Kensington Gardens* 59). Barrie emphasizes Maimie's prettiness, but he also equally emphasizes her darkness and sadistic thrills. Peter asks Maimie to teach him how to be afraid (*Kensington Gardens* 59), a request that borders on transgression and curiosity, but it is also a request that, because of Maimie's association with wickedness and darkness, suggests sexual deviancy. Peter might have been Wendy's teacher in Neverland, but here we see that Maimie serves as Peter's teacher in male-female relationships.

Their exchange is marked by tenderness and sexuality. Just as he first appears to Wendy wearing his nakedness, cobwebs, and skeleton leaves, Peter also appears to Maimie naked (*Kensington Gardens* 56). Peter wants to be a real boy, and Maimie serves as his conduit to real children. He wants her to teach him how to play. Peter cries when Maimie, perhaps with too much disregard for Peter's feelings, tells him that his "ways of playing...are quite, quite wrong, and not in the least like how boys play" (*Kensington Gardens* 58). Play here suggests sexual play: perhaps real boys play better at being boys, that is, at being sexual aggressors. Peter, living among birds, has not yet learned how to play with girls or children: Maimie teaches him.

Among other things, Maimie teaches Peter about thimbling in a scene that is almost parallel to Wendy's and Peter's thimbling scene: Maimie says that she will give Peter a kiss, Peter holds out his hands, and Maimie, to keep Peter from feeling shame, puts a thimble in his hand. Maimie then asks Peter for a kiss, and Peter begins to give Maimie her thimble back. To get what she wants, that is, a *real* kiss, Maimie says:

"I don't mean a kiss," she said hurriedly, "I mean a thimble."

"What's that?" Peter asked.

"It's like this," she said, and kissed him.

"I should love to give you a thimble," Peter said gravely, so he gave her one. He gave her quite a number of thimbles, and then a delightful idea came into his head. "Maimie," he said, "will you marry me?"

Now, strange to tell, the same idea had come at exactly the same time into Maimie's head. "I should like to," she answered, "but will there be room in your boat for two?"

"If you squeeze close," he said eagerly. (*Kensington Gardens* 59)

Peter enjoys kissing, and he enjoys it so much that he asks Maimie to marry him so that he may continue kissing her. His knowledge of kissing is more a question of semantics than ignorance: thimbles and kisses are interchangeable, as they are with Wendy. His knowledge of marriage comes from the fairies that apparently wed often and in groups. The scene shifts from kissing to the idea of marriage to an intimate physical closeness that then progresses into one that is sexually suggestive. Peter tells Maimie that the birds would take away all her clothes to use them for their nests. He tells Maimie, "'and there are some bits of you'—he stroked the fur on her pelisse—'that would excite them very much'" (*Kensington Gardens* 60). Peter stroking Maimie's fur pelisse within the context of excitement is highly suggestive of stroking female genitalia and the pubic hair that covers it. Maimie's impending nakedness alongside this gesture intimates promises of sexual discovery from Peter, promises that can be fulfilled if Maimie agrees to stay with Peter and be his bride. Unlike Wendy, Maimie begins to be turned off by Peter's animalistic nature; his bird-like qualities and his betwixt-and-between nature begin to repel Maimie. He says that she reminds him of a beautiful nest, and Maimie begins to withdraw. Wendy, on the other hand, would love for Peter to nest in her—to set up a domestic scene with him, have his child nest in her, and have him nestled within her roles of mother and wife. The scene ends with Peter giving Maimie many more "thimbles," lying

to her about being able to see her mother if she chooses to live in the Gardens, and finally telling her that if she stays then her mother will replace her. Maimie, of course, chooses her mother over Peter, but before leaving, she “leapt into his arms, so that it was sort of a fairy wedding” (*Kensington Gardens* 62). Peter, although he tries to hide it, is hurt by Maimie’s leaving: “He was so fond of her, he felt he could not live without her” (*Kensington Gardens* 60). Perhaps Peter feels this fondness for Wendy, too; however, his episode with Maimie teaches that in the end he cannot, despite his charms and entrancements, compete with mothers. More importantly, however, Barrie demonstrates, through Peter’s intimate episode with Maimie—full of kisses, squeezes, closeness, tender words, and a marriage proposal—that Peter is indeed capable of sexuality and participating in male-female physical relationships. If Peter is all seriousness and tenderness in Kensington Gardens, then he is full of cunningness and greediness in Neverland. Barrie transforms Peter into the almost cold and elusive lover that we see in Neverland. One can almost read Maimie’s rejection of Peter as the cause of his protecting himself by displaying a tough exterior. Maimie, after all, was his *first*; later, Peter would realize that Maimie is not the only one: there are plenty of little girls.

Of course, we can say that *Peter and Wendy* is an entirely different book and should not be read in conjunction with *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*; however, Peter himself in *Peter and Wendy* tells Wendy about his time there. Wendy asks Peter how old his is. Interestingly, he evades Wendy’s question: “‘I don’t know,’ he replied uneasily, ‘but I am quite young’” (*Peter and Wendy* 23). He goes on to say that he “‘ran away to Kensington Gardens and lived a long long time among the fairies’” (*Peter and Wendy* 23). Just *how long*

he lived there, Peter does not say. Peter, however, alludes to his time in the Gardens, and as a reader, we have to trust the one record we have of his time there.

The Most Delicious Little House for Beginners

Upon her arrival in Neverland, Wendy immediately encounters death and violence. She falls out of the sky, shot down by Tootles, who believed the conniving Tink, who convinced him that Peter ordered Wendy be shot down. Tootles thinks that he has killed the girl Wendy: “‘When ladies used to come to me in dreams, I said, ‘Pretty mother, pretty mother.’ But when at last she came, I shot her’” (*Peter and Wendy* 54). Tootles, like the other Lost Boys, dreams of mothers. Interestingly they associate mothers with attractiveness: “pretty mother.” Wendy is pierced, falls out of the sky, symbolically dies, and in a sense is reborn to assume her new role in Neverland. Like many fairy tales in which a kiss can revive the dead, it is Peter’s “kiss” that saves Wendy’s life. Wendy had previously put Peter’s kiss, the acorn button, on a chain around her neck, and the arrow struck it instead of her flesh. The connotations, of course, of something piercing a “button” are frank, too obvious, and seem to infuse the scene with an uncanny sexuality that perhaps Barrie had not intended. In the play *Peter Pan*, we learn in a rather eerie parenthetical comment that although the Lost Boys are berating Tootles for having shot down Wendy, “every one of them had wanted to have a shot at her” (*Peter Pan* 112). Intentional or no, the parenthetical information is suggestive of a gangbang, and the scene progresses into one that is indeed overtly sexual: Wendy’s body, lying still on the ground, is being studied and watched for its every movement.

The cloak of death allows the Lost Boys to scrutinize her closely. The Lost Boys make a dwelling for the now frail and immobile Wendy. The question is whether to move Wendy into the Home Under the Ground or not. To touch her would be, according to Peter, disrespectful. It is taboo to touch Wendy, and Peter forbids the Lost injured state as well as her pregnancy, however metaphorically (*Peter and Wendy* 57). Wendy, even when immobile, is seen as a lady, a delicate and proper English lady. The boys, however, agree that if she is left where she is then she will certainly die. Wendy's languidness allows the boys not only to stare at her but to probe her while she assumes this delicate state. She is being treated as if she were with child or unconscious after a fainting spell. There is a taboo against touching the lady, and in order to circumvent this rule, Peter suggests that Slightly fetch a doctor. A doctor, after all, can touch the girl under the guise of care. Slightly returns, "wearing John's hat and looking solemn" (*Peter and Wendy* 58). By "respecting" Wendy's body, the boys have devised a method to molest that body while it slumbers. Peter exaggerates Wendy's "delicate" state by telling the doctor that "a lady lies very ill" (*Peter and Wendy* 59). Slightly is pretending that he does not see the girl Wendy and inquires where she lies. In true Pan fashion, as if he were talking about a nymph, Peter answers, "[i]n yonder glade"³⁷ (*Peter and Wendy* 59). It is not at all clear whether or not Wendy is actually unable to move or if she too is playing along with the adventure. Either she is allowing herself to be inspected by the "doctor" or she is inspected against her will, actions that seem to tread a fine line between play and perversion. When Wendy begins to recover, great attention is paid to

³⁷ Interestingly, "Forest Glade Nymph" is the layman's term for the butterfly *Aterica galene*. See also William Taverner's painting "Nymphs Bathing in a Wooded Glade."

her mouth: a Lost Boy notices that “[h]er mouth opens...Oh, lovely!” (*Peter and Wendy* 59). In the play, Tootles actually opens Wendy’s mouth in order to gaze “down into the depths” (*Peter Pan* 115). Again, the response is an exclamation of loveliness: “Lovely!” (*Peter Pan* 115).

Barrie, following the Victorian ideas of domesticity and an ordered household, has Peter suggest that the Lost Boys build a house around Wendy, but the act seems to imply more than shelter—it also suggests a transformation in Wendy: “In a moment they were as busy as tailors the night before a wedding” (*Peter and Wendy* 57). The makeshift dwelling serves as a mysterious cloak over Wendy; under it, she metamorphoses. It is her silk cocoon, a wedding gown, inside of which she undergoes the change from Wendy Darling, obedient daughter of the Darlings of number 27, to the bride of Peter and mother of the Lost Boys. She emerges and serves as the symbolic mother of whom all the boys have been dreaming. She is mystical as well as practical: she can fill in voids of longing that the motherless and unloved boys have suffered, but she can also darn socks and tuck children in at night and prepare meals and see to it that the children do not fight. Wendy’s house serves as her dwelling, but it also seems to serve as her prison: the house is constructed in such a manner that she is “hidden from view” (*Peter Pan* 115), and all night, Peter keeps guard at her door. Wendy sings that she wants her house to be “The littlest ever seen, / With funny little red walls / And roof of mossy green” (*Peter and Wendy* 59). The dwelling is strangely suggestive of female genitalia; the red walls can be likened to a uterus with an endometrial lining, and the mossy roof can be equated to pubic hair, two physical traits that remain unknown to Wendy, who is still pre-pubescent. Upon completion of the house, Wendy says that it is “darling” (*Peter and Wendy* 16),

which can be read as the small version of the house she grew up in, the Darling house, suggesting that this dwelling can serve as a practice dwelling for a grown-up household. In a parenthetical statement in the play, Barrie tells us, “Thus springs into existence the most delicious little house for beginners” (*Peter Pan* 115). The beginner, of course, is Wendy, who is now assuming her new roles as mother and wife. She is, quite literally, a beginner at sex, a beginner at sleeping with boys, a beginner at being mother and wife. Her new functions also allow Peter to role-play: although he says that he does not want to grow up, he enjoys playing at being father and husband, roles that he forbids the other boys.

Prelude to Peter’s Pets: Peter as Bad-boy, Amnesiac Lover

On the island, Peter and Wendy’s relationship quickly turns more serious and at times forebodingly sinister. Before Wendy even meets Peter in the flesh in her nursery, we know that her mind was “scrawled” with him, suggesting that she was smitten with him well before their first encounter. This infatuation with a dream image indicates idol-worship or a teen-idol crush, a romanticism already inherently unhealthy because its love-object has no real counterpart. Up until their first real meeting, Wendy had merely been meeting with Peter in the Neverland of her imagination and not the island made real. Just as she has a predilection to care for the abandoned wolf, Wendy also feels inclined to care for the abandoned Peter. Unlike in the Darling nursery, in Neverland, Wendy must contend with more “others” than the shadow of her mother and Tink’s light. She discovers that there are other women on the island, women who divert Peter’s interest in her from time to time. It is not clear whether or not Wendy feels like the plain, safe

lover next Tiger Lily's brown skin and exotic, leather dress or the mermaids' nakedness and overt eroticism. It is clear, however, that Peter affects all of these women in similar fashion: they all seem to want to make a husband of him, and he attributes their emotions and shunned behaviors to "acting funny." Despite the presence of Tiger Lily, the mermaids, Tinkerbell, and a host of former and future fairies, Peter prefers to make a wife, at least a temporary and make-believe wife, out of mortal girls from middle-class English households. This is not to say, however, that Peter is not enjoying his time with the other girls on the island. Peter has special relationships and privileges with these girls, and he is known to disappear for days at a time.

Peter's inclination to disappear is immediately evident: he begins abandoning the children as early as their flight to Neverland. During the flight, Peter plays a game where he lets Michael fall as close as possible to the sea below before swooping down to save him. Peter enjoys his "cleverness" more than "the saving of human life" (*Peter and Wendy* 34). We also learn that, when it comes to entertainments, Peter "was fond of variety, and the sport that engrossed him one moment would suddenly cease to engage him, so there was always the possibility that the next time you fell he would let you go" (*Peter and Wendy* 34). We can apply Peter's love of variety to his interests in females as well; therefore, the girl who "engrossed him one moment would suddenly cease to engage him," a predicament that Wendy senses right away. She realizes that "there was the possibility that the next time" she "fell" (in love perhaps) that Peter would let her go. Peter's amnesia and his inability to commit are reason for concern for Wendy, yet she does not ask to be taken back to her nursery, choosing instead to participate in the adventure. I am going to quote a long passage from chapter four, "The Flight," because

I find that it reveals Wendy's reservations about Peter's abilities to make a good husband and father:

Peter was not with them for the moment, and they felt rather lonely up there by themselves. He would go so much faster than they that he would suddenly shoot out of sight, to have some adventure in which they had no share. He would come down laughing over something fearfully funny he had been saying to a star, but he had already forgotten what it was, or he would come up with mermaid scales still sticking to him, and yet not be able to say for certain what had been happening. It was really rather irritating to children who had never seen a mermaid.

“And if he forgets them so quickly,” Wendy argued, “how can we expect that he will go on remembering us?”

Indeed, sometimes when he returned he did not remember them, at least not well. Wendy was sure of it. She saw recognition come into his eyes as he was about to pass them the time of day and go on; once even she had to call him by name.

“I'm Wendy,” she said agitatedly.

He was very sorry. “I say, Wendy,” he whispered to her, “always if you see me forgetting you, just keep on saying ‘I'm Wendy,’ and then I'll remember.” (*Peter and Wendy* 36)

What Peter is doing during his absences is not clear; however, he has abandoned Wendy and the children, who depend on him for food and safety as well as navigational direction. (Only Peter was able to steal bits of food from the beaks of birds.) While the children depend on Peter for their adventures, Peter does not need the children for his. He is able to have special privileges with stars and mermaids. (In fact, it was the littlest of the stars that kept a watch-out for Peter to let him know when all was clear in the Darling nursery.) While the children are confined to floating about the clouds, the geography of Peter's adventures is vast: from the sea below to the stars above, from Neverland to the main land, Peter is able to easily navigate alone and enjoy adventures that he may or may not remember. His amnesia is rather convenient when he explains to Wendy just why there are mermaid scales sticking to him—obviously he has been close to the mermaids, and his demeanor suggests that he enjoyed this closeness. While Wendy is hungry, lonely, uncertain, lost, and afraid in the clouds, Peter is enjoying the company of the naked and seductive mermaids far below. Wendy, of course, is obviously disturbed by the fact that the boy she has chosen to run away with could forget her so easily. Although it takes Peter a moment to recognize Wendy and remember that he is escorting the children to Neverland, he seems to know immediately that he has a memory problem. His words to Wendy—"always if you see me forgetting you, just keep on saying 'I'm Wendy,' and then I'll remember"—are tinged with a lover's gentleness, care, and apology; however, they also suggest that Peter is conscious of his inability to remember someone who might harbor romantic feelings towards him as well as his ability, because of this amnesia, to crush the feelings of a lover. And perhaps, rather than demand that Peter take them home straight away, this is why Wendy, who

now has a way to make Peter remember her (by repeating “I’m Wendy”), decides to stay in the adventure.

Peter also abandons his household in chapter seven, “The Home Under the Ground”:

He often went out alone, and when he came back you were never absolutely certain whether he had had an adventure or not. He might have forgotten it so completely that he said nothing about it; and then when you went out you found the body; and, on the other hand, he might say a great deal about it, and yet you could not find the body. Sometimes he came home with his head bandaged, and then Wendy cooed over him and bathed it in the lukewarm water, while he told a dazzling tale. But she was never sure, you know. There were, however, many adventures which she knew to be true because she was in them herself, and there were still more that were at least partly true, for the other boys were in them and said they were wholly true. (*Peter and Wendy* 67-68)

Again, what Peter does during his long absences is not clear, but what is evident is that, like a terrible husband, he has abandoned his wife and kids in favor of *adventures*. His adventures, involving the absence or presence of bodies, are often murderous.

Sometimes, Peter forgets that he has committed a murder; other times, he remembers having killed, but the children find no evidence of his adventure. Particularly interesting is Wendy’s reaction to the wounded Peter: rather than ask Peter just *who* wrapped the

bandage around his head, she attends to him in the manner of loving wife, “cooing” over him and bathing his wound when it is immediately obvious, as evidenced by the bandage, that someone else has attended to Peter’s wounds before her. Peter after all is like her abandoned wolf, and Wendy, we know, wanted more than anything to care for her wolf. If Peter presents himself as a bad husband because of his absences, he also, through his inability to remember, presents himself as the lying, cheating type of lover. Wendy can never be sure if his adventures are “true” or even “partly true.” Whether play or pretend, Wendy confronts a kind of lover who will, if he has not already, teach her lessons about the values of faithfulness and honesty in a marriage; however, it may well be that Wendy prefers her boys to be bad. It may also be that, because her first lessons in love were given by a being who is both caring and careless, conniving and loving by turns, that she has grown to expect such things from a lover, and why, spring after spring, she waits for a Peter who does not come. When Peter does come to fetch her, however, Wendy is excited to reminisce with him. At the end of the first year since her return home, Wendy, like any lover who has been away from her beloved, wants to go over all the memories that they once shared. Peter, however, has forgotten. He does not even remember Hook: “I forget them after I kill them,’ he replied carelessly” (*Peter and Wendy* 147). This forgetfulness is Peter’s biggest flaw in loving. Peter’s words also mark how “kill” can be metaphorical: in a sense, he has forgotten Wendy, has “killed” her and their adventures together.

Peter's Pets: Tiger Lily, the Mermaids, and Tinker Bell

If Barrie uses the Pan figure as a nexus through which to enter an unspoiled place, namely childhood, where there is communion with nature and escape from the limited freedom of adult constraints such as an office job and marriage, then it stands to reason that where Pan lurks there should be nymphs. Of course, Wendy and little girls from the outer land (i.e. those not from Neverland) have the strongest hold on Peter Pan, but there are certain elements of the nymph in the other female inhabitants of Neverland: Tiger Lily, Tinker Bell, and the mermaids.

Tiger Lily presents an important point in the Peter Pan stories, mainly that the sexuality in the stories is easily subsumed, eclipsed, or, in Tiger Lily's case, completely erased due to fears of sexuality in a children's drama. Barrie furthers Tiger Lily's otherness by playing on stereotypes and misconceptions of Native Americans during Barrie's time. Barrie's Native American girl is characterized as sexually uninhibited, unable to speak correct English, brutal, and wild. Barrie plays this unruly girl child against the prim and proper Wendy Darling. In "Babes in Boy-Land: J. M. Barrie and the Edwardian Girl" Christine Roth argues that Tiger Lily and Wendy, although held in opposition to one another, both occupy the borderland of Neverland; they "create a paradoxical construction of femininity: corrupted and corrupting, victims of vicious attack and agents of degenerative (and violent) adulthood" (Tarr 58). Both are civilized and savage; therefore, Barrie may present Tiger Lily in a stereotypical light, but he also presents Wendy in one too. Barrie tells us that Tiger Lily "is the most beautiful of dusky Dianas and the belle of the Piccaninnies, coquettish, cold and amorous by turns; there is not a brave who would not have the wayward thing to wife, but she staves off the altar

with a hatchet” (*Peter and Wendy* 47). Tiger Lily seems like Peter’s female counterpart; like Peter, she is “cold and amorous by turns.” She is also like the wood nymph Daphne, fending off marriage and wishing to remain virginal; however, it is clear in the play and novel that Tiger Lily would let Peter have her for a wife. She is the nymph who would let the little Pan have her. Indeed, an early version of the play included the following scene:

TIGER LILY Suppose Tiger Lily runs into wood—Peter Paleface catch her—what then?

PETER (*bewildered*) Paleface can never catch Indian girl, they run so fast.

TIGER LILY If Peter Paleface chase Tiger Lily—she no run very fast—she tumble in a heap what then? (*Peter puzzled. She addresses Indians*) What then?

ALL INDIANS She him’s squaw. (*Peter Pan xii*)

Of course, it is the Indians who answer here and not Peter; so we do not know how Peter would have answered the “what then?” or if things might have worked out differently in the scene if the Tiger Lily and Peter were alone. We may not be able to surmise Peter’s thoughts; however, we can with certainty say that Barrie intended a sexual Tiger Lily to advance on the puzzled, or perhaps not so puzzled, Peter Paleface. Another deleted scene involves Tiger Lily going to the Home Under the Ground in order to make another advance towards Peter:

PETER Now, then, what is it you want?

TIGER LILY Want to be your squaw.

PETER Is that what you want, Wendy?

WENDY I suppose it is, Peter.

PETER Is that what you want, Tink?

(Bells answer)

PETER You all three want that. Very well—that’s really wishing to be my mother. *(Peter Pan xii)*

Rather than interpret Peter’s response as betraying his sexual innocence, as critics have so often done, I think it interesting to note that, when it comes to Peter’s understanding of a situation it is often more a question of semantics than ignorance. If thimbles to him are kisses, then perhaps mothers to him are also mistresses. In his introduction to *Peter Pan and other Plays* Peter Hollindale contends that Barrie’s “revision emphasized instead the mingled comedy and pathos of Peter’s supposedly presexual perception of the female, not as wife but as mother” (*Peter Pan xii*). I would like to place emphasis on the “supposedly” here, which seems to be an admission of Peter’s sexuality that is not encountered much if at all in Peter Pan criticism. The consensus is to view Peter as existing as a sexually neutered, innocent, ignorant, and oblivious man-child; however, it seems to me that—omissions or no—Barrie included too much flirting and skin-showing and too many jealous episodes, displays of affection, and romantic dramas on the island for Peter *not* to know a thing or two about sexual and romantic curiosity or love. To want to be Peter’s “squaw” or “wife” means being his “mother”—while the terms may

be interchangeable, the roles are somewhat reversed, as we can see from Wendy's actions in the Home Under the Ground. She may mother the children, but she does not "mother" Peter; instead, she plays at being his wife. Tiger Lily's and Tink's predicament: Peter has already chosen Wendy as his "mother."

When we think about the considerations of the nymph-figure that I laid out previously in my *Lolita* chapter, we might be quick to label Tink as such a figure; however, Tink presents an interesting and conflicted case when it comes to her being a nymph-figure. What we know about Tink is that she is a fairy and, like her kind, she will hardly live for a year and a day. She is apparently protective of Peter and enjoys being "his" fairy. She would like Wendy killed and would have no remorse if Wendy were to die. While Wendy can enjoy eternal youth if she remains on the island, it is important to remember that she is not ever immortal—not in Neverland and not in England. The potential for the children to die is always on the island; the potential to grow old, however, is not. Deaths on the island are always caused by murder; Tink's impending death and the deaths of those fairies that have gone before her are instead caused by their short lifespans. Although she may serve as a liminal creature—she is a woman, albeit a tiny woman—and have mythical origins, her status as nymph is disrupted by her availability to Peter; she is Peter's fairy and therefore special, but Peter does not have to recklessly pursue her or threaten her life to keep or possess her. Of course, Wendy also makes herself available to Peter, but Wendy's availability is always threatened by Mrs. Darling's love, something that Peter knows too well: thus, there is to be no talk about mothers on the island.

The mermaids present an interesting choice for occupants of Neverland, and, rather than depicting them as friendly or compassionate beings, Barrie has chosen instead to keep them as many traditions portray them, as Siren-like, conniving, selfish, and alluring seductresses capable of luring men and, in this case, children to their deaths. Half fish and half women, mermaids are truly physically liminal beings; however, their motives and actions also mark them as ambiguous creatures. In 1566 Theophrastus von Honenheim, called Paracelsus, wrote in his *Book on Nymphs, Sylphs, Pygmies, and Salamanders, and on the Other Spirits*, which contains the groundwork for the more traditional Hans Christian Andersen mermaid tale, that mermaids, or undines, were not quite complete; they wanted a human soul, and the way to get a soul was to marry a human (Paracelsus 238). Indeed, the mermaids of Neverland are rather “soulless”: Peter tells Wendy that the mermaids are “such cruel creatures...that they try to pull boys and girls like you into the water to drown them” (*Peter Pan* 118). Wendy is more concerned here by what Peter means by “girls like you” than with the possibility of drowning. She masks this concern by telling Peter that the mermaids’ behavior is “hateful,” which I think can be interpreted as her resenting that Peter sees her as a plain girl and not as fanciful and entrancing as the mermaids.

The mermaids represent both an orgasmic build-up of excess energy and thwarted sexual desire. If they are cruel, the mermaids are also beautiful to the children, who, like little voyeurs, enjoy watching the highly sexualized—indeed rather stripper-like—display of a “lovely girl” leap “in the air seeking to get rid of her excess of scales, which fall in a silver shower as she shakes them off” (*Peter Pan* 118). Both enclosed and open, the mermaids’ lagoon is also full of liminal meanings and suggestive of a peep-

show. The mermaids display themselves on Marooner's Rock, where the pirates leave their victims to drown, and, in another act that blurs death and danger with allure and sexuality, they sing beautifully to the moon, but their songs are also "strange wailing cries" (*Peter and Wendy* 71), which can be interpreted as both cries of pain and pleasure. Seeing the mermaids "at the turn of the moon" is the "most haunting time at which to see them," and "the lagoon is dangerous for mortals then" (*Peter and Wendy* 72).

Although the children and Lost Boys try to catch the mermaids, they fail to; however, when they are close to catching one, they get "scales on some of their hands" (*Peter Pan* 118). While the mermaids are allowed to shake off their excesses, the children must make do with a few of their glimmering scales. Peter, however, enjoys a special relationship with the mermaids: although he pretends to be hunting "[o]ne of the most bewitching of these blue-eyed creatures" (*Peter Pan* 118) with the children, it is he who gives the mermaid the signal to flee when the children are about to pounce. If there is a taboo against touching Wendy for the Lost Boys and children, then there is also a taboo against touching the mermaids; only Peter is allowed to touch.

Violence

In *Peter and Wendy* there are two islands: the island of one's imagination and the island *made real*. The island is made real when the children arrive in Neverland. Here, the imaginary and the real are allowed to comingle. However, there is real death: fairies live hardly for a year and a day, a pirate's body greets the flock of freshly plucked children, and Wendy encounters a near death immediately. Flying over the island, the children learn that the pirates are below waiting to kill them all. Peter boasts that he has killed

“tons” of pirates (*Peter and Wendy* 38). The difference between the imagined Neverland and the actual Neverland then becomes apparent to the children: “Thus sharply did the terrified three learn the difference between an island of make-believe and the same island come true” (*Peter and Wendy* 41). Wendy, through the uses of enchantment, mainly Peter’s enchantment, prematurely confronts the unknowns of growing up; however, I think it important to see just how much death and violence figured into her experiences in Neverland. Although Wendy did not die when she was struck down by Tootles upon her arrival in Neverland, she did face the very real possibility of dying. And although Wendy did not die on Marooner’s rock—the kite came to fetch her safely away—she could have drowned. When learning how zealous Peter is to kill and how much he has killed, Wendy chooses to remain with her murderous playmate. Peter has an appetite for domesticity, one that is fulfilled in part through Wendy, but he also has an appetite for bloody adventures; Wendy, nonetheless, sticks around to be his wife.

Hook’s death may loom as the famous death in *Peter and Wendy*, but before Hook was killed—partly through the cleverness of Peter and partly through the old crocodile—there were a whole flock of children and pirates who died along the way. Indeed, even the narrator of the novel shows cruel intention when he chooses to kill for sport: “Let us now kill a pirate, to show Hook’s method. Skylights will do. As they pass, Skylights lurches clumsily [sic] against him, ruffling his lace collar; the hook shoots forth, there is a tearing sound and one screech, then the body is kicked aside, and the pirates pass on. He has not even taken the cigars from his mouth” (*Peter and Wendy* 46). Although Hook is the one who performs the murder, Barrie, through this death of convenience, determines the novel’s plot through the whims of the narrator, who can make the

characters commit murder if he so wishes it. Poor Skylights hardly lives for one moment; indeed, he hardly lives through the span of one sentence, and he is killed merely to show the readers just how quickly and heartlessly Hook can potentially kill the children and Peter, his biggest rival.

If Hook can kill quickly and heartlessly, then Peter is no less guilty. In fact, Peter himself is the impetus for violence on the island. When Peter is away, the inhabitants of Neverland live more or less peacefully, and “when pirates and lost boys meet they merely bite their thumbs at each other. But with the coming of Peter, who hates lethargy, they are all under way again: if you put your ear to the ground now, you would hear the whole island seething with life” (*Peter and Wendy* 43). With the return of Peter we get the return of what may be seen as “play,” but what is in actuality, because of its implications, real danger and potential bloodshed. Of course, everything may be deemed play to Peter: *he* never seems to die. For Peter, there can always be a host of boys and fairies and other playmates—the redskins and pirates and mermaids. The Lost Boys differ from Peter: they are boys, but they are not betwixt-and-betweens; underneath their bearskins, they have mortal bodies. The history of how they come and go is swept under the rug as quickly as the history of how the future Darling girls come and go: “The boys on the island vary, of course, in numbers, according as they get killed and so on; and when they seem to be growing up, which is against the rules, Peter thins them out” (*Peter and Wendy* 43). It is not clear just how the “thinning out” of the Lost Boys is accomplished: does Peter kill them or perhaps return them to their respective homes, Kensington Gardens, or some other place? What is clear, however, is that once they have outgrown Peter or once they can no longer prove useful to Peter’s love of adventures, they disappear and

are easily replaced by another flock of boys eager for adventures. Of course, they also get killed, and again, how they die is not revealed either. (Similarly, Wendy is also replaced; however, the reasons surrounding her replacement, I think, are more complex than adventure-sharing or her usefulness in adventure-making. Indeed, her advanced ability to make-believe overwhelms Peter.)

Through these encounters, Wendy comes into premature contact with the unknowns of violence and death. If the children are using enchantment in order to fantasize about being in dangerous situations, then their way out of these predicaments calls on real solutions. The danger for the children, however, may have very little to do with Hook's claw or the plank or the poisoned cake that the pirates have made for them. Barrie writes, "All are keeping a sharp look-out in front, but none suspects that the danger may be creeping up from behind. This shows how real the island was" (*Peter and Wendy* 47). The real danger concerns the great unknowns that loom over them, mainly, their impending adulthoods.

When the Honeymoon is Over

Peter clearly adores domesticity, and Wendy is all too happy to comply. And while "make-believe and true were exactly the same thing" (*Peter and Wendy* 58) to Peter, he begins to get unnerved by Wendy's conviction that "make-believe and true" were the same thing. I am ending with my chapter on *Peter and Wendy* with what I call the "dissolution scene," because it illustrates both the uses and the abuses of fantasy. The scene allows Wendy to learn about endings, more specifically, the endings of love affairs, what occurs when lovers go their separate ways, a lesson that is taught sooner or later in

adult life. Although Kincaid characterizes Neverland play as “inconsequential play” (Kincaid 283), we see how Wendy’s playing house with Peter has consequences for Wendy, who has become romantically invested in Peter. Here, however, we see how Wendy gains knowledge of what it is like to be broken-hearted through her pretend marriage to Peter. Although Peter is accustomed to abandoning and forgetting and betraying, Wendy is not accustomed to these acts. In the dissolution scene, Wendy sits knitting a sock, playing not only at being a wife, but also at being older; she says to Peter: “with such a large family, of course, I have now passed my best, but you don’t want to change me, do you?” (*Peter and Wendy* 91). The thought that Wendy could grow older and would grow older disrupts Peter’s make-believe. He asks, “It is only make-believe, isn’t it, that I am their father?” (*Peter and Wendy* 91). Wendy replies, “But they are ours, Peter, yours and mine” (*Peter and Wendy* 91). Again, Peter demands that Wendy relent, that she dispel the play. She finally does, though begrudgingly, and he lets out a sigh of relief. Peter’s response is what triggers Wendy to demand that he reveal his intentions: in other words, Wendy would like to know if Peter has any intention of marrying her. In keeping with Victorian values, Wendy believes in love and marrying for love (Tosh 58). Peter says that he is her “devoted son” (*Peter and Wendy* 91), not lover, not husband, not even boyfriend. Peter, who has been treating Wendy as a lover and wife, suddenly hides behind her role as mother in a rather convenient move to shirk his responsibilities as husband to Wendy. Kincaid writes that “Wendy really wants Peter to herself...she wants to touch, kiss, possess” (Kincaid 286). Peter’s response and his denial of Wendy’s desires is what finally makes Wendy return home. She was happy to stay in Neverland as long as make-believe and true were the same thing: Peter now reveals they can not be

married outside of Neverland. Wendy and Peter have their spat in front of the children; the children dance, but the scene is full of premonitions of departure: they sing a “deliciously creepy song...in which they pretended to be frightened at their own shadows” (*Peter and Wendy* 92-93) and when their pillow fight was over, “the pillows insisted on one bout more, like partners who know that they will never meet again” (*Peter and Wendy* 93). Even Slightly, whose head appears to always be so empty, is full of talk about endings. Unsuccessful at his attempt to tell a story, he says, “Yes, it is a dull beginning. I say, let us pretend that it is the end” (*Peter and Wendy* 93).

The ending, then, comes rather quickly, and the manner in which Peter and Wendy leave one another, like coy lovers repressing hurt, says much, I think, about the nature of their relationship. As if asking for a funeral, Wendy asks Peter to “make the necessary arrangements” (*Peter and Wendy* 97) for their return home. Barrie writes that there is “[n]ot so much as a sorry-to-lose-you between them! If she did not mind the parting, he was going to show her, was Peter, that neither did he....But of course he cared very much” (*Peter and Wendy* 97). When Peter loses Wendy, and when he begins to ache because he knows he is losing Wendy, we can not help but think of his losing Maimie, and how, because he has survived one loss, it is easier for him to play the cool and heartless lover when telling Wendy bye. He knows she will go home. And, despite his fondness for Wendy, “[h]e would keep no girl in the Neverland against her will” (*Peter and Wendy* 98). It is decided that Tinker Bell will escort the children home while Peter stays behind on the island. Peter keeps his cool, even after making terrible intimations that, should the Lost Boys find their mothers, these mothers may not be likable. He says, “no fuss, no blubbering; good bye, Wendy”; and he held out his hand cheerily, quite

as if they must really go now, for he had something important to do” (*Peter and Wendy* 101). Wendy, of course, does not want a hand shake; she would much rather give Peter thimbles, but as there was no indication that Peter wanted a thimble, Wendy, unschooled in how to keep a lover or leave a lover, merely tells Peter to change his flannels and take his medicine, leaving him to do tasks that she once enjoyed doing so lovingly and thereby, in essence, leaving a phantom of herself on the island. When the children hear the clash of the war between the pirates and redskins above the Home Under the Ground, they all look to Peter for help; their “[m]ouths opened and remained open” and, in a rather suggestive move, “Wendy fell on her knees, but her arms were extended toward Peter” (*Peter and Wendy* 101). And this is how, I like to think, that Wendy goes on living, even after she returns from the island, waiting at her open window, spring after spring, even after she is grown, with her arms always, in a sense, “extended toward Peter.”

Although the farewell scene lacked kisses and embraces, there was, despite the criticism that would rather pin Peter as androgynous or asexual, much touching and tenderness between Peter and Wendy. Peter may be quite good at make-believe, but, while other children can dream of their respective Neverlands at night, Peter, because he already resides in Neverland, cannot dream of it. Instead, Peter has nightmares:

Sometimes, though not often, he had dreams, and they were more painful than the dreams of the other boys. For hours he could not be separated from these dreams, though he wailed piteously in them. They had to do, I think, with the riddle of his existence. At such times it had been Wendy’s

custom to take him out of bed and sit with him on her lap, soothing him in dear ways of her own invention. (*Peter and Wendy* 110)

Barrie does not elaborate on what “ways” Wendy is “soothing” Peter; we only know that, having no models to imitate, she invents ways to comfort Peter. After all, if she were “mothering” Peter, would she not call on the ways Mrs. Darling soothed her and her brothers? Additionally, when Peter remembers how his mother barred him from his bedroom, a memory that causes him much emotional pain, Wendy runs to him, and she “felt him solicitously, lower down than his chest” (*Peter and Wendy* 96). Tosh writes that Victorian “[h]usbands looked to a partner in life to whom they could pour out their anxieties, their doubts and their aspirations. Home was felt to be the only place where the vulnerability that lay behind the public mask of strength and imperturbability could be shared with someone else. The sympathetic ear and soothing tongue of the wife were regarded as the most important dimension of the healing power of home” (Tosh 54). Wendy is known for applying bandages and poultices, but, like a good Victorian wife, she is also an emotional salve for Peter who, like his counterpart Hook, is always lonely and depressed and feeling unloved. Barrie seems to occlude just *where* Wendy was touching Peter: “lower down than his chest” could mean Peter’s belly, but it could also mean his penis. Barrie’s use of “solicitously” also suggests sexual advances or procurement. These choices may seem odd for a children’s book if we think that it is we who are perverting the text and not the writer who is infusing his text with a multitude of possible sexual readings. I suggest that readers should not think of these choices as odd but rather intentional. Furthermore, it is not the reader who is perverting the text: it is

Barrie. There is one more night of tenderness shared between Peter and Wendy, but this night comes at great cost. Wendy is exposed to several previously unknown types of violence: Hook kidnaps her and then her life and the lives of her children are threatened before she is made witness to multiple murders.

The kidnapping presents an interesting use of enchantment precisely because Hook replaces Peter as Wendy's playmate. Furthermore, Hook treats her like a lady. When the pirates pluck the boys from the trees, they toss them in the air to each other, except:

A different treatment was accorded to Wendy, who came last.

With ironical politeness Hook raised his hat to her, and, offering her his arm, escorted her to the spot where the others were being gagged. He did it with such an air, he was so frightfully *distingué*, that she was too fascinated to cry out. She was only a little girl.

Perhaps it is tell-tale to divulge that for a moment Hook entranced her...(*Peter and Wendy* 107)

Hook is polite and gentlemanly; indeed, it is as if he is *playing* at being Wendy's date for the evening. Overwhelmed with her special treatment and Hook's romantic behavior, Wendy is unable to "cry out" or resist the charming Hook, almost in the same fashion that she was unable to resist the charming Peter, who smuggled her out of her parents' home. And why should Barrie tell readers that it is "tell-tale to divulge," even if for just a moment, that Wendy was "entranced" by Hook? After all, Hook is merely putting on a

show, trying to appear in proper “form” as he is fond of doing; he has not bewitched her or used any devices other than his own person, and yet, he has managed to entrance and fascinate the “little girl.” While Peter may be a decayed Pan in a little boy’s body, we might think of Hook as being a little boy caught in a grown man’s body. And despite that grown body, Wendy is attracted to him. Whether a sign of her waywardness or Hook’s charm, it is obvious that Wendy seems to prefer her boys to be a bit on the bad side. She may only be “little girl,” but she is made witness to more grown-up scenes and is engaging in more grown-up acts; she takes Hook’s arm. The gagging and the tying down of the children are activities that walk a fine line between play and perversion. Wendy, “too fascinated to cry out,” appears to be caught in the throes of ecstasy in a scene that is highly erotic, dangerous, and yet entrancing.

The violence teaches, too, that Wendy is *different* from boys. In a scene more reminiscent of the bloody end of a Shakespearean tragedy than a light and joyful children’s story, fifteen pirates die. The bloodshed begins when the cocky (but we have to remember also the lonely and sad and haunted) Peter, crowing from the ship cabin, kills off five pirates one by one. The pirates think that the “doodle-doo” (*Peter and Wendy* 128) is a ghost come to haunt their ship, and Peter, being a creature more zombie than alive, may very well be a ghost. Finally, Hook says, “No, lads, no, it’s the girl. Never was luck on a pirate ship wi’ a woman on board. We’ll right the ship when she’s gone” (*Peter and Wendy* 129). Wendy, the only female besides Tink in the Home Under the Ground, is now presented as an symbol of ill-luck; as Barrie does not comment on her reaction to Hook’s words, we can only surmise how Wendy interprets the events as

being caused by her presence on the island and how all of Neverland might be set “right” once she is gone.

Wendy, of course, is spared: Peter has already freed Wendy of her ties and is hiding beneath her cloak. Instead, Hook confronts Peter, who sends the pirates into a confusion that causes all manner of swords and leaps into the shark-filled ocean. In the novel, some of the killers are eclipsed, but the murders are not: “Some of the miscreants leapt into the sea, others hid in dark recesses, where they were found by Slightly, who did not fight, but ran about with a lantern which he flashed in their faces, so that they were half blinded and fell an easy prey to the reeking swords of the other boys” (*Peter and Wendy* 130). With almost all³⁸ of Hook’s “dogs” dead, only Hook is left to contend with, and, as there is a touching taboo in Neverland, there have always been strict orders that only Peter is allowed to fight Hook. And thus Wendy witnesses her lover and his rival duke it out before Hook, having no other choice, “cast himself into the sea” (*Peter and Wendy* 132), finally succumbing to the now-silent crocodile. While the children may be cheering on the death of Hook, it is interesting to think of his death as a rather sad moment in the book; when Hook knows that the end is near, we learn that his mind “was slouching in the playing fields of long ago” (*Peter and Wendy* 132). Indeed, Hook was fond of play, too.

At the end of the very bloody night, Wendy notices that it is well past one in the morning. She makes the children beds in the pirates’ bunks, but Peter would not sleep:

³⁸ Barrie has spared us the deaths of the two friendly pirates: “Fifteen [pirates] paid the penalty for their crimes that night; but two reached the shore: Starkey to be captured by the redskins, who made him nurse for all their papooses, a melancholy come-down for a pirate; and Smee, who henceforth wandered about the world in his spectacles, making a precarious living by saying he was the only man that Jas. Hook had feared” (*Peter and Wendy* 133).

he “strutted up and down the deck, until at last he fell asleep by the side of Long Tom. He had one of his dreams that night, and cried in his sleep for a long time, and Wendy held him tight” (*Peter and Wendy* 133). Ironically, Peter curls up, not to a teddy bear, but to Long Tom, the cannon that would have, yet never did shoot him down. He has killed all of his playmates, and the Long Tom no longer signifies play or danger: the once highly-charged symbol has been stripped of its meaning and purpose. Perhaps Peter cries in recognition of a world that he has destroyed and brought down and the other world outside of Neverland that he chooses not to participate in. Wendy is leaving him, all of his children are leaving him, and the pirates are dead; however, for one last night, he and Wendy can share the embrace, closeness, and consolation of lovers.

Conclusion

There are, of course, many other scenes in which Wendy uses the enchantments of Peter and Neverland to navigate the unknown. Pivotal scenes include her giving memory tests to the children, making sure that the children mind their manners at meals, treating the children’s wounds and giving them medicines for various ailments, escaping from death by the kite’s tail, and waiting each year, as she grew older, for Peter to come and fetch her for spring cleaning. In each situation, the boundaries between play and pretend are blurred: Wendy and the children could have easily died and walked Hook’s plank to meet the sharks below, but it was Peter’s play sword, and not the real sword, that saved them.

At the fringes of these encounters, the girl Wendy, through her make-believe motions of mothering and marriage to Peter Pan, experiences what may be seen as

trespassing into a subversive sexuality, one that is, at its core, implicated in death, decay, and rebelliousness. The “unknowns” stalking towards Wendy are her impending puberty, which estranges her from Peter; middle-age, which makes it impossible for her to fly to the island again; and ultimately death. Her progeny of girl children—her daughter and her granddaughter and her great-granddaughter and so on—an endless chain of Wendys, will replace her. There will always be a girl child to spring clean for Peter, who is not a boy refusing to grow up, but rather a figure of death and decay, an old and lusty goat as was his namesake Pan. Just as Humbert Humbert’s Lolita found her prototype in Annabel Lee, Wendy too has a prototype in Maimie Mannerling of Kensington Gardens. This replication of girl children by Peter, however, has death as its impetus. The girls must be replaced because they, unlike Peter, grow old and die. Like the nymphs that Pan pursued, Wendy is only sought after as long as she is young.

In the end, what Peter and Wendy leave each other are phantoms of themselves. In addition to a figure of decay and death, Peter is certainly also, as the pirates suspected, a ghost, escorting dead children to the afterlife, burying children and, like a dead father that children might encounter in the woods, appearing to children for games and adventures.³⁹ He is also, like ghosts, weightless and invisible at times. In the play, we learn that Wendy “has been told by the boys as a deadly secret that one of the queer things about [Peter] is that he is no weight at all. But it is a forbidden subject” (*Peter Pan* 124). As she grows older, Wendy can sense Peter, but she can hardly see him at all. Her inability to see him begins during one of her spring cleanings on the island. She tells

³⁹ This is in reference to an earlier cited quote: “Children have the strangest adventures without begin troubled by them. For instance, they may remember to mention a week after the event happened, that when they were in the wood they met their dead father and had a game with him” (*Peter and Wendy* 7).

him, “If another little girl—if one younger than I am—(*She can’t go on*) Oh, Peter, how I wish I could take you up and squdge you!” (*Peter Pan* 153). She advances towards Peter, but he draws back. She tells him, “Yes, I know” (*Peter Pan* 153). And Wendy begins then to be too big and too old to see or touch Peter. She seems to understand that if she wants to be with Peter, she must remain a little girl. In the epilogue to the play, “When Wendy Grew Up,” after she lets her daughter Jane fly away with Peter, Wendy tells Nana, “when she grows up I will hope *she* will have a daughter, who will fly away with him in turn—and in this way may I go on for ever and ever” (*Peter Pan* 163). Just as Alice haunted Carroll “phantom-wise,” Wendy has found a way to do the same to Peter.

Roth and other critics would prefer to think of Wendy and Peter’s marriage as a “mock courtship” (Tarr 61); however, Wendy loves Peter even when she has grown older, even when she has had a child with one of Peter’s old Lost Boys. She constructs a way to “go on” with Peter “for ever and ever.” For Wendy, her relationship with Peter was not practice for real life; instead, it became the one life that she wanted to live, that she kept on living, that she continued to mourn when she grew too tall to let out her hem. To get to the Home Under the Ground, Peter fits Wendy and the other children for their tree—each has their own hollow tree through which they enter the Home Under the Ground: “Peter does some things to you, and after that you fit. Once you fit, great care must be taken to go on fitting” (*Peter and Wendy* 63). Wendy’s predicament: she stopped fitting. She grew, and, unlike Alice, she did not have an elixir—real or imagined—to make her small again. Spring cleaning taught her much about loss and leaving: each spring, Peter remembered less and less until it was as if they had never loved at all, as if they had never lived as husband and wife at all. The Neverland and her

former life there are gone, teaching, like her play with the flower taught, that this world,
this life too will be gone.

Chapter Four

“Between the impossible alternatives of existing” or Nympholepsy Twice-removed:

Henry Darger’s Uses of “Reenchantment” and the Poetics of Appropriation

in John Ashbery’s *Girls on the Run*

The three other works in my study make literal or suggestive use of kidnapping: in Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*, Humbert Humbert kidnaps Lolita from Camp Q, Quilty kidnaps Lolita from the hospital, and Humbert sees, at a post office, pin-up photographs of girl children who are “missing”; Peter Pan, according to my reading, abducts Wendy from the Darling nursery; and although Lewis Carroll does not literally kidnap Alice Liddell, he does appropriate her in order to enchant his underground adventures and his staged photographs. Similarly, in the works of Henry Darger, we see how appropriation and kidnapping work to enchant his novel and paintings. When Darger, who is often referred to as an “outsider” artist, died in 1973, he left behind a collection of art that consisted of replications of girl children who flowered in hundreds of collage-paintings. The girls peopled his book, *The Story of the Vivian Girls, in what is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinian War Storm, Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion* (unpublished), and were taken from found material such as comics or advertisements and traced or copied over and over again. Darger’s Girls⁴⁰ seem to inhabit the enchanted nymph

⁴⁰ Throughout this study, I will refer to the girl children in Darger’s novel and art as “Girls,” thus allowing them the status as a proper noun. I do this for three reasons: it is easier for the reader to know when I am merely writing about generic girl children; Darger’s Girls are hardly generic; and I feel that they, having suffered as much as they have in their fictional and material existences, deserve it. Additionally, when referring to Darger’s Girls, people will often mistakenly call them the “Vivian Girls”; however, the Vivian Girls were the seven princess sisters in Darger’s novel. Granted, many of the

island of which Humbert dreams. They reproduce endlessly among bulging and enormous flowers, as youthful as they were when Darger transfixed them forever in watercolor on paper. Like traditional nymphs, they are associated with landscapes, and in Darger's work, they are associated with the flowery and stormy landscapes in which Darger sublimated them. Contemporary artists, fascinated by the Girls, create art to bring the Girls back to life, as it were: in 2003, Academy Award-winning director Jessica Yu made a film about the life of Henry Darger, *In the Realms of the Unreal: the Mystery of Henry Darger*; an all-girl, low-fi, indie-rock band named the Vivian Girls released their debut album in 2008; and John Ashbery published *Girls on the Run* in 1999.

Girls on the Run is a book-length ekphrasis that reenchants Darger's Girls without, however, attempting to follow Darger's narrative. In order to analyze nympholepsy twice removed, or the appropriation and reenchantment of Darger's Girls by Ashbery, this chapter is broken down into two parts: one is an examination of Darger's metaphorical kidnapping, methods of appropriation, and uses of enchantment; the second examines the poetics of appropriation in Ashbery's poem by focusing on Ashbery's kidnapping of Darger's Girls. Although there are overlapping themes in Ashbery's ekphrasis and Darger's paintings, we see that Ashbery is not quite concerned with Darger's narrative as he is with exploring his own anxieties. The Girls are merely Ashbery's vehicle with which to explore his own childhood, including mourning the loss of that childhood, the intrusion of puberty, and his attachment to actual girls. In *The Uses of Enchantment*, Bruno Bettelheim argues that storytelling, especially fairytales and fantasy, helps listeners to navigate the unknowns of adulthood. Ashbery, however,

plots involve the Vivian sisters; however, there were many more—thousands more—Girls than just the seven Vivian Girls.

seems to reenchant Darger's Girls in order to navigate the unknowns not of adulthood but of death. Ashbery's poem is the product of nympholepsy twice removed: Ashbery, rather than strictly paying homage to Darger's works, aspires to ownership of those works, and in order to make his own literary art, Ashbery kidnaps Darger's kidnapped and reenchanting Girls so that he may reenchant them yet again.

Enchantment and its uses figure prominently in my study on nymphs and nympholepsy. In my study, we see how enchantment works to entrap not only listeners but nymphs. In the case of Lewis Carroll, we see how he uses enchantment by way of storytelling and photographing to entrap his nymphs. Humbert Humbert narrates a fantasy about his true faunlet self captured in what he considers to be a grotesque adult male body and thereby uses enchantment in order to maintain his solipsistic island and perhaps justify to himself his pedophilic desires and actions. The nympholept Peter Pan uses his own brand of make-believe adventures in order both to lure and to keep his Lost Boys and Wendy on his own enchanted island of Neverland. To be enchanted means to be delighted, but it also means to be spellbound.

Although Darger's paintings, with their sometimes horrific images of girl children being hung or choked to death, do not always delight, they are certainly always bewitching, and the viewer, caught in the spell of their bizarre and arresting beauty, is instantly enchanted. In the case of Darger, who used found material to construct an alternative reality populated by little girls, I was moved to explore another term: *reenchant*. Because I am using this term in a specific and theoretical sense, I will take a moment here before proceeding to explain how it is being used and why it is important to my understanding of both Darger and Ashbery's work. In his essay "The Strange Hell of

Beauty...,” Michel Thévoz writes, “Darger...steals his images, lifts them from conventional narratives, common everyday journals, and sentimental stories. He takes them out of context, disorients them, and reenchants them” (Anderson 17). Thévoz’s use of the word “reenchants” allowed me to explore the uses of enchantment and how it related to older men and their pursuits of girl children, unlocking for me the key between the uses of enchantment and Darger’s work with girls. (Later in this chapter, I explain how Darger used enchantment to navigate the unknowns of his solitary life.) Thévoz, however, uses the term “reenchant” as if only to mean bring back to life or reanimate. The term and its possible theoretical uses urged me to explore how reenchantment furthers enchantment and how it relates to entrapment and nympholepsy.

Bettelheim argues that fairy tales simplify our wishes and desires without dispelling their potency; enchantment, for him, brings listeners out of safe territory and into confrontations with “death [and] aging, the limits to our existence, [and] the wish for eternal life” (Bettelheim 8). These confrontations, although present in the fairy tale, I see as also occurring in nymph narratives, which are associated with death, the fear on the part of the nympholept that his beloved will pass into puberty and womanhood, and a quest for immortality on the part of the nympholept. This immortality, however, is achieved solely through the nymph, who lives on through the immortalized art object that the nympholept, taken with the urge to create, makes in order to possess the nymph that he cannot in fact possess. In other words, Humbert can only love *Lolita*, now that Dolores Haze is dead. In order to possess their nymphs, nympholepts must instead *reenchant* their already aged or dead nymphets.

The process of reenchanting involves kidnapping; that is, in order to reenchant, the nympholept must take something out of the public sphere and move it into his own private one, thereby solipsizing his desires through a narrative that he uses for self-enchantment in order to sustain his alternative reality or belief system, thereby mythologizing the narrative. The nympholept becomes his own enchanter in this regard; he brings otherwise dead material, a previously enchanted object or story, back to life in order to navigate the unknowns of the narrative that he wishes to pursue. The reenchanting object is fetishized, standing in for the nymph that no longer exists except in the nympholept's private narrative. Darger took otherwise dead images of girls out of trash bins and out of their public contexts and privatized them; he created a world that so enchanted him that he conflated his created world with his reality. Ashbery, too, by kidnapping Darger's Girls to populate his ekphrasis, reenchants the Girls in order to explore his own personal anxieties.

To reenchant is to take otherwise dead material and make it alive to the nympholept; however, nympholepts, through their unceasing and maddening desire to possess their nymphs at any cost, drive their nymphs to sublimate into their creations, thereby immortalizing them. What Roland Barthes in *Mythologies* says about myth and the privation of history could easily be applied to my meaning of reenchantment: "Myth deprives the object of which it speaks of all History. In it, history evaporates. It is a kind of ideal servant: it prepares all things, brings them, lays them out, the master arrives, it silently disappears: all that is left for one to do is to enjoy this beautiful object without wondering where it comes from. Or even better: it can only come from eternity" (*Mythologies* 151). In Darger's creations, history similarly is effaced. In Darger's art, the

Coppertone Baby is no longer a child advertising sunscreen, but rather, she now serves as an agent to eternity. She, like the other found objects, is deprived a public meaning and has, through reenchantment, been given a private one that exists outside of time and history in service to the nympholept alone. To reenchant is to create an eternal enchantment. The created fetish object, that lives on after the inspiring nymph is dead, is charged with the essence of his beloved and stands in for the beloved that the nympholept cannot fully possess. In Darger and Ashbery, we see how reenchantment functions to privatize, to solipsize, to unbury the dead in order to further their own enchantment. The public enchantments are assimilated within the nympholept, and he thereby privatizes them to the point of mythologizing; in other words, the reenchantment become the stories by which the nympholept can live.

Darger's Girls as Nymphs: Classical and Victorian Connections

Darger's Girls may appear to be preserved specimens, permanently pinned on paper, traced and painted in watercolors onto long scrolls of butcher paper, yet to me, they are incipient beings, forever on the verge of *becoming*. They exist on a point of both arrival and departure, as if just having sprouted. Like the other nymphs in my study, Darger's Girls exemplify an ambiguous, two-fold nature; they are the embodiment of the innocent American idealized little girl taken from popular culture, playful and carefree, yet they have been transported from advertisements and comic books into a threatening world of storm clouds where they suffer torture and death and fight real wars with real men. The metaphor of the Girls' being bound within Darger's paintings and novel overlaps with the Girls' confinement within the limitations of childhood and ultimately

of life. Darger's Girls, like traditional nymphs, are both ancient and youthful, engaged in play yet fleeing from terror; moreover, like the hunted nymphs of traditional mythology, they too must sublimate themselves into landscapes (textual, visual, and actual) in order to save themselves from not only imaginary armies of men, but also from the artist Darger and the poet Ashbery. Preservation for nymphs concerns not merely life but also innocence, virginity, and remaining an unmarred child at play. In Darger's novel, we see how the Girls try to preserve their Christian ways and refuse sinful orders, such as killing a fellow Girl, taking punishment rather than doing bad deeds. Like nymphs, they would rather die than give up their innocence and purity. In her book *Greek Nymphs: Myth, Cult, Lore*, Jennifer Larson writes that nymphs are always associated with a "mortality and death narrative" (Larson 4), and Darger's Girls are undoubtedly fleeing from murderous men, although they are not always successful.

In *Sound and Fury: The Art of Henry Darger*, Edward Gomez, who refers to Darger's Girls as "valiant nymphets" (*Fury* 7), writes that Darger's writing style includes "some of the florid touches that are typical of Victorian children's literature" (*Fury* 4) and that film director Yu "has described Darger's narrative as an 'Alice in Wonderland-meets-the-Old-Testament' kind of story" (*Fury* 12). Similar to Victorian children's literature, Darger's story of the Vivian Girls, although it takes much of its found images from early to mid-20th century Americana, is indeed strangely reminiscent of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. Like Alice, Darger's Girls are often depicted among larger-than-life flowers, yet in the distance, a storm cloud, also seemingly larger-than-life, is brewing. Puberty seems to be threatening the Girls, as it threatens Alice in *Through the Looking Glass*. In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice's size is physically manipulated when she ingests

Wonderland drinks and cakes, and similarly, Darger, through photocopying, tracing, and collage, presented the same image of a Girl in various sizes within the same painting. Like George MacDonald's *The Light Princess*, the Girls may appear at times to be calmly naked, yet unlike other traditional children's stories, Darger's Girls sometimes have penises; they are pre-pubescent, yet unlike Victorian child heroines, they meet bloody and grotesque deaths.

The cult of the girl child, which emerged in Victorian children's literature with its resurgence of the girl child as heroine, carried over into the popular culture of early 20th century America, giving our nympholept Darger a bevy of girls to rescue and reenchant. Nympholepsy, which Larson describes as "a heightening of awareness and elevated verbal skills believed to result from the nymphs' influence on a susceptible individual," is evident in both Darger and Ashbery. Darger, taken by the little girls that appeared in newspapers, comics, and advertisements, was also obsessed with his little sister who died with his mother in childbirth. More, he was devoted to a girl child who was murdered in Chicago and inserted her as a character in his *Realms*. (A discussion on this intermingling of fantasy and reality occurs later in this study.) Darger also petitioned his church many times to adopt a little girl. He was never granted the request, and wifeless and childless, he instead used enchantment, brought on by the images of girl children, to explore an alternative reality that he toiled over for most of his life. There, he could have as many girls as he wanted. Darger's room, which was stuffed and overwhelmed by his paintings of girls as well as cuttings and tracings of girls, served as his solipsistic island of nymphs, which provided both creative inspiration as well as the enchantment he seemed to need in order to live in his reality.

Ashbery capitalizes on Darger's nympholepsy: the work of one nympholept now functions as the catalyst for another nympholepsy-struck individual to create. Darger might have rescued his girls from garbage cans, but he discarded the original contexts from which the girls sprung. Ashbery, similarly, discards the narrative of Darger's works in order to reenchant the Girls, thereby using the Girls to explore his own nympholeptic impulses. Darger appropriates the image of a popular comic strip character to stand in for the heroine of his novel; Ashbery appropriates Darger's reinvented or reenchanting Girls in order to stand in for his own anxieties surrounding the loss of childhood and impending death. Both nympholepts use appropriation in order to work against another element in the nympholeptic urge, that of working against Chronus, or time, in order to achieve a stasis or Arcadian existence. The works, like the other nymph narratives in my study, mourn the unachievable Arcadian ideals of eternity and immortality. For these nympholepts, it is the girl child that best represents these Arcadian ideas, and therefore she is worth kidnapping, reinventing, and reenchanting.

Henry Darger: the Appropriation Artist, or Kidnapper Extraordinaire

Darger was so entranced, so enchanted by his Girls that they not only existed as static images in his art; they also affected his daily dealings, and he often used the Girls to barter with a seemingly unresponsive God. As much as the Girls depended on Darger to exist and continue existing in his novel, Darger, it would seem, also depended on the Girls to keep on in his solitary existence. The moment that Darger died, the Girls, because they depended on Darger to write their narratives and illustrate their world, metaphorically died as well. Now under museum glass, now sequestered by art collectors

and art dealers, now showcased here and there, now sold on the market as if they were truly child-slaves, caught in a world of girl children trafficking, separated from each other and dismantled from their original context and home, the Darger Girls no longer exist in the manner that Darger wished for them to or in the manner that Darger posed them. They now literally suffer the fate of separation and dismantlement that they suffered in the novel. Instead of being allowed to live together in the world that Darger created, they have been separated and orphaned; they have been, in a sense, showcased and embalmed. In museums, they seem to be forever beckoning to their private lives with Darger, in which they were hidden yet, for Darger, lively and mortal.

The sheer volume of what Henry Darger wrote and drew suggests a man deeply working away within enchantment, using it to navigate the unknowns of his solitary life. The bulk of Darger's work is too large to be included in any one volume. Even the most comprehensive book, John MacGregor's *Henry Darger: In the Realms of the Unreal*, provides merely a fragment of Darger's creative works. By day, the highly devout Catholic Darger toiled as a dishwasher, janitor, and bandage roller, all within Catholic hospitals.

Although he only mentions it once in his autobiography, by night, Darger was an artist. He was born in 1892 in Chicago. When he was four, his mother died in childbirth, and his little sister was given up for adoption. In 1900, when his father, who was often infirm, could no longer take care of him, Darger was placed in Mission of Our Lady of Mercy Catholic boys' home. When Darger was thirteen, he was, according to some reports, caught masturbating in school and as a consequence for his "heart" not being "in the right place" (Biesenbach 287) was then sent to the Asylum for Feeble-Minded Children in Lincoln, Illinois. While there, Darger learned that his father had died and,

after a series of attempts, he successfully ran away when he was sixteen and returned to Chicago. Real life was incredibly difficult for Darger, and it seems that in order to live, he had to invent a story to live by and was so enchanted by this story that often this story and real life blurred. He began to work on his novel when he was only nineteen years old, and he would continue to work on it until he was physically unable to. In 1972, at the age of 81, Darger was moved into Little Sisters of the Poor, a charitable Catholic nursing facility where his father had also died. After his death, his landlords discovered what some call the largest collection of American folk art.⁴¹ The drawings were made to illustrate Darger's novel, believed to be the longest novel ever, composed of 15,000 legal-sized pages, typed front and back, with single-spaced type. The girls in Henry Darger's paintings are the "Vivian Girls," who are Catholic princess sisters, as well as their army of volunteer Catholic girl children who lead a war to free girl children slaves from the

⁴¹ Stories about when and how and by whom the drawings were found vary from person to person. Darger's landlady, Kiyoko Lerner, who now controls Darger's estate, has conflicting stories as well. Some stories say that Darger's art was found before he died, while other stories report that his art was discovered only after he passed away. Some stories report that Henry's walls were covered with his art, making it impossible, I think, for those who were involved with dismantling his room while he was still alive, to overlook it. One neighbor, in an interview with Jessica Yu in her film, says that he told Darger while visiting with him at Little Sisters of the Poor that he had seen the paintings. Kiyoko Lerner's husband was an artist himself and an art historian, and in at least one interview, Lerner says that she and her husband discovered the paintings while Darger was alive; in another interview, she claims to have found the paintings after Darger died. Whatever the circumstances, one senses that the secrecy surrounding the discovery has become more tightly controlled as Darger's popularity increases. Lerner also seems to control what can be said about her and her husband. In any event, my question, which will probably never be answered, is: if the Lerner's knew exactly what they had stumbled upon in Darger's room, why didn't they ask him what he would like done with his art and writings? Furthermore, if a Darger original now fetches upwards of \$80,000, where is the money going? Darger gives explicit instructions in the first pages of the *Realms* that his writings should never be duplicated and that all the "gold" and "silver" in the world cannot buy his paintings.

Glandelinians, men who are more often than not dressed as Civil War generals or as professors complete with academic gowns and mortar boards.

Some critics have said that Darger used found material, especially drawings and photographs of girls, in his art because he did not approve of how he drew; however, I like to think that Darger used images of girls from popular culture because he wished to reinvent them and allow them to enchant the story that he was writing. Instead of allowing a static photograph of a girl to lie lifeless, Darger reenchanting her. Although many of Darger's sources were recovered from his room at 851 Webster Avenue in Chicago, it is not known just how much source material was thrown out: when Darger was moved into Little Sisters of the Poor, his landlords apparently wanted to renovate and supposedly asked Darger if they could clear out his room.⁴² In an interview with Klaus Biesenbach in *Henry Darger: Disasters of War*, Darger's landlady Kiyoko Lerner speaks about the initial clearing out of Darger's room: "The room was filled with piles of papers, magazines and furniture that Henry had accumulated over forty years. After two truckloads of junk were carted away, Nathan [her artist husband] discovered stacks of drawings on top of the bed" (*Disasters* 19). Never mind for now that this contradicts other reports where Lerner says that the drawings were discovered only *after* Darger's death. What is alarming is that two whole truckloads (whatever "truckloads" might mean—these could have been large or small trucks) of Darger's belongings, which might have included sketches, source materials, inspiration pieces, jottings, memorabilia, and more, were not only thrown out but were also referred to as "junk."

⁴² Darger already inhabited this room when the Lerner's, who lived next door, bought the building.

Although it is highly unlikely that Darger was familiar with postmodernist theory, his work, which calls upon both high and low culture, the literary and the popular, works to fulfill postmodernist tendencies. In Darger's art, we see what Fredric Jameson in his essay "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," would consider an integration of seemingly emotionally devoid cultural products and lending new, personal signification. Darger rescued what Jameson refers to as the "free-floating and impersonal" (McCaffery 220) popular culture relics of his time and synthesized them into the machinery of his enchantments. While Jameson's essay does not touch on outsider art, we can see how his categorizations and theory of effacing history and "postmodernist 'nostalgia'" play out in Darger's works. Jameson cites how the postmodern tendency towards "resurrection of the dead of anonymous and silenced generations" to give way to "the retrospective dimension indispensable to any vital reorientation of our collective future" results in that very retrospective becoming "a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum" (McCaffery 221). Through this process, history is effaced and the past is changed or modified. What is interesting in the case of an outsider artist such as Darger is that the artist is not only working to resurrect "the dead of anonymous and silenced generations," but the artist too can be seen as part of that which is dead, anonymous, and silenced.

Darger, like many folk and outsider artists, resuscitated "junk," and as his art works to modify the past, at the same time it rouses nostalgia. He revived girls from their frozen places in popular culture—comic strips, magazines, advertisements, newspaper photographs—by inserting them into his *Realms*, thereby preserving the popular culture of his day but also artistically reinventing it at the same time. In his art,

we see, over and over again, the Morton Salt Girl and the Coppertone Baby. There is Shirley Temple and Little Miss Muffet. Additionally, one sees Little Annie Rooney, who, like Darger, was also an orphan.⁴³ One particular Little Annie Rooney comic strip showcased a friend of Annie Rooney who ran alongside her, and this image was used over and over again by Darger to show a girl on the run from the weather or enemy forces. I observed, however, that the original comic does not show any feet on this girl: I am surmising that Darger must have drawn them in either by hand or by tracing the feet from another source, illustrating the ingenuity that Darger used when trying to achieve an effect. Darger's resourcefulness also included tracing only the body of a girl, perhaps from a coloring book, and then tracing another girl's head onto that body. In this way, he could use several girls and have endless variations of them. In Darger's *Realms*, there are many Girls who are either getting choked to death by men or hung to their deaths from trees, and these Girls often have their mouths open with their tongues sticking out. Biesenbach's *Henry Darger* showcases many of Darger's source materials, including a clipping taken from the *Chicago Daily News* on March 6, 1957, which shows a girl with her tongue sticking out; she does not appear to be in pain in the photograph, but rather she appears to be happy—the caption reads “She Gets the Bird”⁴⁴ (Biesenbach 89). Many of Darger's paintings include tracings of this girl child, and she

⁴³ Between 1927 and 1966, the orphaned comic-strip girl traveled with her dog Zero in response to the popularity of the Little Orphan Annie comic-strip, and she, along with other girls from the comic, were among Darger's favorites.

⁴⁴ Upon further inspection, with a loupe, of the reproduced newspaper clipping, the story underneath the photograph states “Young Christina Hass, 7, gets only a chilly response as she happily fondles two frozen penguins that were brought back from the” [text is torn off] (Biesenbach 89).

appears to be the model for Darger's preferred strangled, choked, suffocated, and hung expressions for his Girls.

The skilled appropriation artist employed varying techniques to achieve his desired outcomes. On his paper and cardboard canvases, which sometimes could be as large as two feet high and ten feet long, he used watercolors to fill in his tracings. He drew when he needed. Sometimes, instead of tracing, he would collage by pasting images from magazines and other sources directly into his paintings. These were sometimes photographs and sometimes cartoons; sometimes both photographs and cartoons were collaged in the same painting. Later in his life, Darger took his most replicated girls to the pharmacy to have the images photographically enlarged in various sizes (at a cost that was a third of his monthly income), thereby allowing him now to endlessly enchant his girl children in a rather *Alice in Wonderland*-like manner—the girls could be small or large depending on the needs of his scenes. He delighted in having his simulacra reproduced by both his own hand and with the aid of technology. He kept his source material highly organized, keeping images of storm clouds and tornadoes⁴⁵ tucked together, using a coloring book cover for a folder (Biesenbach 95).

⁴⁵ The weather, but most especially thunderstorms and tornadoes, fascinated Darger. In addition to keeping a ten-year weather journal, in which he compared the daily forecast to the actual weather, he also wrote a long tale of a (supposedly fictional) tornado named “Sweetie Pie” in his autobiography, *The History of My Life*. The story of Sweetie Pie takes up pages 2,951-5,084 (2,133 pages) in contrast to his autobiography, which takes up 206 pages (Biesenbach 279). These pages were numbered by Darger himself. Preceding the autobiographical section of the history is a section that recounts Biblical stories, and following the autobiographical section is a 1,603-page description of a tornado that Darger witnessed when he was fifteen. The next section, which takes up pages 1,810 to 2,950 (1,140 pages), describes a fire in a wheat field. Lastly is the story of Sweetie Pie, which according to Carl Watson, who has spent much time working with *History of My Life*, is “the story of the tornado, which eventually takes the name Sweetie Pie and the anthropomorphic shape of a strangle-headed child cloud, i.e., a girl’s head

Darger as Novelist: Reenchantment as Rescue and Recovery

Darger kidnapped his girl army from various sources, but the way in which he sought his girl children, often by looking in other people's garbage, makes his theft seem more like an act of rescue and recovery; Darger rescues the girls who would otherwise have been buried in landfills and gives them, through his art and writings, a chance to live again. He reenchants the otherwise dead children. In some cases, however, the girl children that Darger surrounded himself with were literally dead or kidnapped. After a photograph of Elsie Paroubek that Darger clipped from the *Chicago Daily News* (published on May 9, 1911) disappeared, Darger bargained with God, praying for its return. Paroubek's body was found in a drainage canal on May 8, 1911, and it was believed that she was kidnapped and then murdered (MacGregor 59). The disappearance of this girl from Darger's collection marks an interesting use of enchantment in the *Realms*. With Paroubek, he takes a girl child who is dead, reenchants her as a living Girl only to have her murdered by the Glandelinians, and then, when his source material disappears, Darger threatens to kill off more of his Girls. Although Darger bargained with God in his real life by first increasing his attendance at mass and reciting more prayers, only to turn away from God by not attending mass when the photograph was not returned, he also bargained with God in his novel. In the *Realms*, Darger employs enchantment in a fictional realm in order to recover what has been lost to him in reality.

being strangled by cloudlike arms, her protruding tongue forming the funnel of the tornado" (Biesenbach 279). "Strangle-headed child cloud" is Darger's own description of the funnel cloud. All of these writings, however, are included in Darger's *History of My Life*, and for this reason, I think that we should, despite whatever logic leads us not to, read all of these sections as histories of Darger's life rather than "fictional" accounts.

He threatens more destruction, more wars, and more dead Girls if the photograph is not returned, and he follows through on his threats. Darger appropriated Elsie Paroubek for his *Realms*: she became Annie Aronburg in his novel, and her character is murdered by a Glandelinian general. Although murdered, Annie Aronburg continues to be a major part of the *Realms*, “making occasional dramatic appearances in the form of a ghostly ‘celestial child’” (MacGregor 495). The disappearance of Paroubek’s photograph therefore marked a major loss for Darger: he lost his kidnapped source material, the real life connection to his fictional world. During this period, the Vivian Girls suffered large casualties in war, as their author had threatened to join the Glandelinian army if the photograph was not returned. The following excerpt reveals Darger’s ability to erase the line between reality and fantasy and to allow these realms to coexist:

Late this morning before the battle began today a soldier came to me and told me there was a man who lost a picture of the Aronburg child whose name was Annie Aronburg. The picture was not exactly lost, but stolen on him with a lot of other pictures of children, or burned or something. He claims that this battle, which extended fifty miles along the Conservatory Run, will never be won unless it is recovered. So now we are facing disaster and it makes me inclined to think that his surmise is true, for through Viviania and the others, I know a man who really did lose such a picture, and since he did we never had luck since. (MacGregor 497)

A dialogue ensues, in which we find out that the man who lost the picture is General Henry Joseph Darger. The characters speculate that Darger “must be a nut” and question how the lost photograph could be responsible for the outcomes of the war. We learn that the photograph was in a book with many other photographs of girl children and that the whole book disappeared from Darger’s room. The dialogue insists that a fellow boarder stole the book and burned it, along with the photograph of Paroubek and other girl children, in a furnace. For Darger, who had such a close and enchanted relationship with his kidnapped girls, such a fate must have seemed unusually cruel. Darger’s threats, and the Vivian Girls’ hardships as a result, lasted for a period of over four years, from March 1912 to November 1916. His perseverance, which included repeatedly writing to the *Chicago Daily News*, shows Darger’s intense emotional attachment to his Girls, source or otherwise, as well as his deep level of enchantment, believing that the fictional events in his created world could result in empirical change in his real, daily life.

Darger’s art has become increasingly popular; however, his writings have been little studied by literary scholars, often leaving art critics to interpret the writings Darger left behind. Although John M. MacGregor provides an invaluable service by including many excerpts from the *Realms* in *Henry Darger: In the Realms of the Unreal*, it is miniscule when compared to the 30,000 legal-sized pages of text that the novel actually occupies. The literary scholar, therefore, must work from what is available, which is not much and is moreover selected by others, mainly those with art backgrounds. What an art historian may find of interest may not be what a literary critic finds noteworthy. If Darger was an

appropriation artist in his visual art, he was just as gifted at appropriating in his literary pursuits. Biesenbach writes:

Much of the *Realms* is a pastiche of appropriated literary excerpts and paraphrases from L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and its sequels, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and many other books. Although it is by no means a well-crafted novel, what gives the saga a kind of artificial life is Darger himself: both literally, as he writes himself into the story, and behind the scenes, as he becomes the animating force underlying the creation of a strangely familiar and even more strangely aberrant mythology. (Biesenbach 272)

I take contention with Biesenbach's assessment of Darger's work as "by no means a well-crafted novel," and would have found it helpful to know by what standards Biesenbach measures craft in novels. Although Darger's novel can only be glimpsed through sundry published excerpts and what museum-goers are able to read at the American Folk Art Museum, where two pages from one of his bound books are on display under glass, one can sense the sheer genius that it would require not only to *craft* but also to sustain such a mammoth work. If Darger was a self-taught artist, and art historians find it awesome that such a self-taught artist could produce what he did, I think it is also fair to say that Darger was a self-taught novelist and his ability to produce tens of thousands of pages of writing is just as awe-inspiring.

Just as Darger was working within a postmodernist vein in his visual art, Darger, even as an “outsider,” was also working within a postmodernist literary tradition. Darger had visual models, pulled from popular culture for his *Girls*; however, he had what contemporary readers would consider as highbrow literary source material for his novel. In “POSTcyberMODERNpunkISM,” Brian McHale explores a brand of literary postmodernism, cyberpunk, which can be understood as lowbrow science fiction novels borrowing from highbrow novels and vice versa. McHale, however, argues that while this borrowing can be observed in these two venues, cyberpunk and its modes of recycling and tendencies toward genre collapse can be extended into other literary categories as well. Darger, who appropriated and recycled both highbrow literature and popular culture images, certainly would be seen as a precursor to cyberpunk according to McHale. While relying at times on the novels that he had read, Darger also incorporated the popular lowbrow science fiction of his day: his novel, after all, takes place on another planet, and there are a host of fantastical creatures with magical forces that aid the Vivian Girls in their plight. In addition to the works that Biesenbach cites, Darger also read Charles Dickens, a close study of adults being cruel to children if there ever was one. Sometimes, Darger did not appropriate passages, but he might have appropriated settings or circumstances. There is even a scene in which the Vivian sisters recognize a setting from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*:

“It is strange that the shell explosions did not rip away the galleries,” said Evans. “The galleries look weak enough. And say my fairies,” he suddenly exclaimed, “Have you not noticed that this hospital building is

shaped like little Eva St Clares house seen in the novel of ‘Uncle Toms Cabin?’”

“It does to me!” answered Jeannie.

“So it does,” said Violet. “But I never noticed it before. Maybe that is why the shells did not batter it into ruins like it did the other buildings around here. I wonder if there is a mystery about this place too.”⁴⁶

(*Disasters* 199)

To appropriate in this way, reenchanting passages and settings from novels that he had read, Darger makes a most brilliant and postmodernist literary move.

Although Darger was never formally schooled in literature and had limited reading material, he experimented with fictional techniques seen in a wide variety of novels, both historical and postmodern. Darger toyed with meta-fictional techniques as seen in novels such as *Don Quixote* and *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*. He also daringly appropriated by writing himself as well as his Girls into other existing texts. Not only did he transport himself and his characters into other literary worlds, he also transported elements from other existing texts into his own imagined world. Unlike the novels that Darger read or unknowingly emulated, however, Darger’s novel was never intended to be read by others, nor did it seem to have a planned end. In *The Origin of Table Manners*, Claude Lévi-Strauss examines myth alongside the serial novel, or *roman-feuilleton*. As Darger’s novel is long, seemingly never-ending, and aligned with myth (in that it helped Darger to both live and live within the world of his reenchantments), what

⁴⁶ When quoting Darger’s writings, I have not taken the liberty of correcting it. All quoted passages are transcribed as Darger wrote them.

Lévi-Strauss has to say about the narrative structure of myth and how it relies on the serial to lend significance to episodes within the narrative can be applied critically to Darger's novel, which, like the myths that Lévi-Strauss analyzes, compounds imaginary and fantastical creatures dependent on the inner workings of a people's worldview and natural laws, both physical and spiritual.

Darger, who created both visual and literary collages from the mythic fabric of American comic books and popular culture as well as the few works of literature to which he was exposed, enchanted and mythologized through "collage." Lévi-Strauss notes that myths are often "collage," in that they appropriate from other myths: "The myth therefore appropriates elements from other myths which are all the more easily separable from their sources in that they themselves belong to very rich paradigmatic sets, whose underlying coherence is often concealed by their complexity" (McKeon 102). So while it might be said that the various elements in Darger's works are disparate, Lévi-Strauss argues that the elements, when examined, reveal a unified narrative, epic and mythic in its proportions. Darger's *Realms*, therefore, reveals the narrative of his America, and it is one of violence, good versus evil, injustice towards children and those who do good, and meanness for meanness sake. The only good in this narrative arrives in the form of ghost children and supernatural deities and fantastical creatures; in other words, the physical world is difficult and deadly while the spiritual and imagined one is safe and loving. Darger's *Realms*, when examined in this light, aligns itself with the basic good versus evil narrative and the rift between the spiritual and physical dimensions inherent in so many cultural myths. The appropriate form for such a narrative, Lévi-Strauss argues, is the serial novel with its ability to both mirror and reject the periodic

laws of the physical world in which it operates. Darger's art and writings showcase his creative need to both mirror and reject the world in which he lived. Lévi-Strauss writes, "In the myths, as in the *roman-feuilleton*, creation proceeds by imitations which gradually distort the nature of the source" (McKeon 102). While Darger imitated elements of his physical world by copying, tracing, and assimilating its cultural icons, he privatized these icons so that they might escape the physical world and instead operate in the mythic one that he created. The novelist, Lévi-Strauss contends, "collects . . . scattered elements and re-uses them as they come along, being at the same time dimly aware that they originate from some other structure, and that they will become increasingly rare as he is carried along by a current different from the one which was holding them together" (McKeon 103). Darger, too, although he might never had considered himself a novelist, collected "scattered elements" and reused them to create a different current from the one in which he found himself. Working away deeply within his enchantments, Darger perhaps was, as Lévi-Strauss says, only "dimly aware" of the outside world that was used to construct his inner one.

Darger, however, was fully aware of the spiritual world; he was a highly devout Catholic, and his novel showcases his spiritual devotion as well as his knowledge of his own, as well as his Girls', mortality. Darger's novel, like serial novels that Lévi-Strauss examines, does not tell a "closed" (McKeon 102) story or a story that was apparently ever meant to be finished. Although nymph narratives are associated with death, the creations of the nympholepts counter this mortality by a drive towards immortality; an epic novel, therefore, whose end is never apparent, is an appropriate mode in which to create. In *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*, Frank Kermode illustrates

how the novel functions existentially: the end prefigures the author's own end, and thus to resist an end, however fictive, is to resist one's own death. Of authors, he writes, "The End they imagine will reflect their irreducibly intermediary preoccupations. They fear it, and as far as we can see have always done so; the End is a figure for their own deaths" (Kermode 7). The resistance of an ending is tantamount to resisting mortality: Darger not only engaged in a never-ending narrative, but he also believed that both his inner and outer realities depended on his creative impulses. The outer world was just as reliant on what would happen next in his novel as his Girls were depending on him to ensure their safety and victory. Because Darger was working so deeply within his own enchantments and conflated his real and fictive lives, resisting an ending meant resisting his own death as well as the death of his army of Girls. All of their lives depended on his continued narration. If only Darger had money or a family to keep him at home and not at a hospital for the poor, one wonders how the ending might have come out or how the narrative might have turned out. All readers have is a sign of abandonment. Darger was taken away from his Girls, and his Girls, in turn, would be taken away from each other.

Although Darger, like other nympholepts, had a drive towards immortality—transforming their mortal nymphs into immortal art works—he also explored violence and death within his *Realms*. Darger's written art shows as much appropriation as his visual art, and both also display extremes of beauty and violence. The Girls, like nymphs, may frolic and play in pastoral scenes blooming with gigantic mushrooms and daisies, yet at other times, they are strangled and eviscerated, which was referred to as "rape" in Darger's written texts, although critics seem to all believe that Darger did not know what rape was. In these moments, the landscapes lack flowers, and all Darger

paints in are merely men and the macabre trees dappled with hung Girls. This conflation of violence and rape would be little surprise to James R. Kincaid who, in *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture*, writes about the power imbalances between child victims and those adults who, through violence, make victims of them:

...as we become more and more aware of power imbalances in sexual relations, it finally becomes simply obtuse not to see any sexual encounter as coercive, subtly coercive perhaps but definitely so. Paradoxically, as we extend the great benefit of the power paradigm, its ability to enable the operations of decency and mutual protection, we mix the categories so badly that sex becomes violence and all human encounters are rapes.

(Child-Loving 28)

Darger's writings also oscillate between these extremes of violence and what Kincaid refers to as "protection." For Kincaid, the abode of protection and the abode of violence depend on one another to exist. In a passage that highlights Darger's ability to write violence, a Girl faces death in a most horrifying way:

It was too dreadful to even contemplate, but the naked disgusting facts were that, as she stepped down on the soft object—her foot slipped, as it were from a rotten slimy substance, throwing her partly down, and as she had one hand on her nose, and in her efforts to recover herself, plunged

both her hands into the soft decaying flesh of the head, causing the hair to peel off the scalp. (*Disasters* 201)

This passage is merely one of hundreds of examples where Darger places his Girls in terrifying situations in order to show the hardships and injustices that they endured to fight for the greater good. Some Girls go mad; others are made to murder others. On the other hand, Darger could write the most beautiful and fairy-tale like adventures for his Girls:

In their sleep, which lasted only a few hours without interruption, they had a long and beautiful dream. This was their dream. They had been put into a very large cell, where they wandered around for a very long while, when finally they grew very tired, and sat down on the hard stone floor, just ready to cry, when all at once, a dear child of unearthly beauty, appeared before them, and asked what was the trouble, and why they were about to cry, so they told the celestial child all about it, and she said, Never you mind, we will all take good care of you. Don't be afraid. There is a golden carriage waiting in the street for you. I'll take you to it, and then I'll go on ahead, and see that supper is ready. (*Halls* 167)

There were tender moments, as this passage suggests, and in these tender passages the reader glimpses the loving Henry Darger who, rather than being seen as an insane child-murderer (as many would like to pin him), is the loving deity who would very much like

to care for girl children. Kincaid would see this oscillation between beauty and violence as standard for child texts, which he sees as “fable[s] of psychotic repetitions, battering and banging the body of the child between different and distant theatres to enact shows of violence, shows of love. There is not one of these theatres but imagines it is giving love without the violence, imagines it is offering a haven from the horror” (*Child-Loving* 390-391). In order to love his Girls, Darger, according to Kincaid, had also to bestow violence on them. Children, writes Kincaid, must be presented to us as “damaged and tearful” (*Child-Loving* 391) so that we might rescue and love them.

In addition to rescuing and loving his Girls from fictional men, Darger also wished to love and rescue real girl children. Although he never had children and his baby sister was given up for adoption, Darger petitioned his church to let him adopt a girl. His autobiography mentions having committed mean acts against other children when he was younger; once he threw ashes in the eyes of neighborhood girl. He writes, “You remember I wrote that I hated baby kids. So indeed I did. Yet what a change came in me, though, when I grew somewhat older. Then, babies were more to me than anything, more than the world. I would fondle them and love them. At that time, just any bigger boy or even grownup who dared molest or harm then [sic] in any way was my enemy” (Biesenbach 282). Darger, although he places his Girls in harm’s way, wants to care for them, as is evident in his narrative, and because he was unable to have a girl child of his own to care for, it seems that he used enchantment in order to create a world in which he was the sole caretaker of a whole army of little girls. He rescued them from trashcans, and he placed them in dangerous situations so that he might continue rescuing them over and over again.

Poetics of Appropriation: John Ashbery's *Girls on the Run*

John Ashbery's *Girls on the Run* seems to want to rescue Darger's girls, too. The book jacket tells us that the poem is "loosely based on the works of the 'outsider' artist Henry Darger, a recluse who toiled for decades on an enormous illustrated novel about the adventures of a plucky band of little girls." The title describes Darger's Girls quite accurately: they *are* always on the run. In Darger's paintings, his Girls are sometimes pursued by men; they are sometimes hurt by men; they are definitely sometimes killed by men. They run among colossal flowers, among ocean waves, in schoolhouses.

Ashbery's ekphrasis suggests, however, that Darger's Girls are not running merely from men, but rather, they are running from elements that will change or metamorphose them; they run from night, impending puberty, adulthood, and ultimately death, which looms like "an insane force in an otherwise docile universe" (Ashbery 42). The real motivation, however, to write about Darger's Girls may have little to do with attempting to understand Darger's universe and more to do with attempting to resuscitate this world, to bring the Girls back to life, as it were. Darger resuscitated his found material and gave these girls new life; in *Girls on the Run*, we see Ashbery giving new life to Darger's Girls through what we might call the poetics of appropriation. Rather than "freeing" Darger's Girls from their static existences on butcher paper under museum glass, Ashbery seems more concerned with owning the Girls, that is, making them his own by using them to serve the purposes of his narrative, which is more lyrically centered on himself than Darger. Jameson describes the postmodern as an effacement of history, and in Ashbery's poem, we see how the historical relic, Darger's art, is also

effaced in order to explore the personal. Rather than paying homage to Darger's art, Ashbery's ekphrasis appropriates the Girls to do Ashbery's bidding.

Ashbery opens *Girls on the Run* with the central elements of his poem: a sense of impending doom contrasted with the girls at play ("A great plane flew across the sun, / and the girls ran along the ground"); an incoherent and overwhelming cataloguing of characters, random bizarre incidents and descriptions ("The sun shone on Mr. McPlaster's face, it was green like an elephant's"); and an urgent sense that one should flee the scene ("Let's get out of here, Judy said. / They're getting closer, I can't stand it"). Additionally, time, which figures as the main culprit or central pursuer of the Girls, is established throughout the poem as a reference to fashion, a clearly feminine concern:

But you know, our fashions are in fashion
only briefly, then they go out
and stay that way for a long time. Then they come back in
for a while. Then, in maybe a million years, they go out of fashion
and stay there. (Ashbery 3)

The narrator, whose name we never learn, establishes a sense of time that is ancient. The narrator seems to have lived through centuries. The present, moreover, seems crisply understood as ephemeral, contrasted against a future related in infinite, yet finite terms ("in maybe a million years they go out of fashion / and stay there").

If the present is understood to be ephemeral to the Girls, it is also "made up like a cadaver" (Ashbery 40); like nymphs, it is forever mutating, yet at the same time it has already departed. Within this cadaverous present, Ashbery tells us that the Girls are "waiting for something coherent to happen" (Ashbery 47), which might mean two things: the world in which Darger paints the Girls is incoherent or the world in which

Ashbery writes the *Girls* is incoherent. Yet, to call *Girls on the Run* an incoherent poem would not be a harsh assessment, but rather, it would confirm the poem as an ekphrastic success, as Darger's world is overwhelming and seemingly incoherent: there are simply too many *Girls* doing too many tasks surrounding too many dangers on too many paintings relating to a story that takes up too many pages. In her review on the book "Tidbit and Uncle Margaret" in *Frigate*, Elaine Terranova writes:

Darger's work is a collage of real and imagined worlds. Ashbery's is a collage of the real and imagined worlds and of Darger's invention. It's not, as some have said, that Ashbery has cleaned up Darger and omitted the violence; he has omitted the story. There is no continuous narrative in *Girls*, as there is in Darger. There are 21 beginnings, sections like an odyssey's [sic] many of which tell us that they represent the events of a single day. And so we have the fragmented beginnings of story, coming out of the longings of childhood, somewhat like Once upon a time or There were seven beautiful princesses or Drink the magic potion. Maybe that's what we remember most, after all. (Terranova)

The cast of characters alone seems too unruly for any possible world, real or imagined.⁴⁷

Ashbery hints at these intertwined, numerous, and anonymous lives: "Everywhere in the

⁴⁷ Combing through the book, I have assembled the cast of characters, only some of which appear in Darger's *Realms*, in the order that they appear in Ashbery's poem: the girls, Mr. McPlaster, Judy, Laure, Tidbit, the principal, Henry, Dimples, Larissa, Diane, Pete, Rags the Mutt, Mother, the wounded cow, the Denizens, Aunt Jennie, Shuffle, Stuart Hofnagel, Peggy, "dearest," Tommy, Heidi, Peter, the parson, a fox, a blue rabbit,

tangled schist / someone was living, it seemed to say, this is my doing; / whoever shall come afterward is a delusion” (Ashbery 7). Although Darger did name many of his Girls, Ashbery seems to do so only to pursue his own narrative: because he cannot know fully the story of the Vivian Girls, Ashbery supplies his own story, creates his own names for the characters, and projects his own interpretation of Darger’s art into the narrative, thereby reenchanting Darger’s enchanted Girls. (Ashbery, moreover, never mentions Jennie Richiee, who is Darger’s main heroine.) Just as Darger populated his paintings with a myriad of flowers, Ashbery pencils in, within fifty-four pages, over 150 characters, which slip and evade narrative importance. The Girls are, as they might appear to be in Darger’s paintings, “in unreasoning variation to another” (Ashbery 33). The main competitors for the role of protagonist in the poem are the evasive narrator and death, which lurks underneath each action, each description. This refusal to commit to a cohesive, character-driven plot mirrors the ephemeral nature of Darger’s paintings,

sea cows, Angela, Bunny, Philip, the preacher, Aunt Clara, a spider, Uncle Philip, Tootles, the foreman, the man, Uncle Margaret, Dave, the militia, the sentry, “this person,” a policeman, Allen, Pliable, Jane, a detective, drunks, Cupid, Larry Sue, Pam, Mr. Jenkins, Emily, American tourists, justices, the seer, geese, campers, Jenny Wren, Tom Cat, Bruin, Kitty, Tim, Bill the Barrel, an accountant, Canadian trappers, a therapist, water buffalo, a nightingale, plastrons, the general, good General Metuchen, the landgrave, Phoebe, little old Rhode Island lady, Farmer Jones, skunks, glowworms, Melinda, the maker, the king, truant officer Fred, Trevor (dog of Fred), rascals, Josephine, squirrels, a mad neighbor, the bees, hyenas of sleep, a mastodon, tall Lupine, Damian, General Forester, a marauder, a mauve magician, guards, mercenaries, Lou, the explorer, pack of returning travelers, blue bats, the Creator, Dolores, the mollusk, Jane’s warlock, shore patrol, ditch diggers, a limpet, “the daughter or granddaughter of somebody famous,” Uncle Wilmer, “my kitty,” Chunky Ida, a distant cavalry, Father Time, Uncle Bert, fens, flies, birds, “two principle survivors,” the perpetrators, wasps, the mouse, Bridgitte, the guides, Dennis, saints, hippos, two women catching a train, Aphasia, pre-Columbia bats, slim weasels, Pamela, witnesses, nurses, a sheep, Prudence, Harry, Pierre, Lochinvar, Swann, a mystery wolf, Hopeful, Talkative, Hopeful’s father-in-law, Overall Boys, Susie, the postman, pterodactyls, Paul, dancers, a horse, twelve princesses, Daddy, a driver, an old lady, Young Topless (perhaps my favorite), a bandoleer, shrimp, caregivers, Mary Ann, and Jimmy.

where winged beings and girl children appear and disappear and where “new creatures fly past, out of the starting gate forever” (Ashbery 29), leaving all but a few fragments of themselves in a narrative that seems both to concern and not concern their lives: “and ever after, as adults / wandering the velveteen streets, we’d come upon someone who would have known someone / who wasn’t all there” (Ashbery 19).

The identity of the narrator is important because, as Ashbery suggests, the narrator has permission to write definitively on the story of the Vivian Girls. Providing a spin on the traditional invocation to the muse, Ashbery writes on the first page of the poem, “Write it now, Tidbit said, / before they get back. And, quivering, I took the pen” (Ashbery 3). If we are to read this correctly, Ashbery then, because he writes or is the one who takes the pen, is the “I” of the poem; if Ashbery is indeed the narrator proper of *Girls on the Run*, then this suggests that Ashbery is writing himself in as a Girl, and moreover, he too is on the run. The question of sexual identity does not seem important to the characters: there are female uncles (Uncle Margaret), a nameless male character is described as being “the daughter or granddaughter of somebody famous” (Ashbery 43), and the Girls are even referred to as “neutered pets” (Ashbery 12), perhaps a reference to the fact that Darger often painted his Girls as naked warriors with penises. That Ashbery would identify with and write in the persona of a girl is hardly surprising when one considers what Ashbery told an interviewer for the *New York Times Magazine* upon publication of *Girls on the Run*: “I was fascinated by little girls when I was a little boy, and their clothes and their games and their dolls appealed to me much more than what little boys were doing. Therefore I was sort of ostracized” (Terranova). The contemporary ekphrasis then, it would seem, works less to explain or describe a work of

art and more to explore the author's own personal anxieties. The specific images of childhood that Ashbery writes are not so much inherent in the paintings of Darger; rather, they seem to be Ashbery's personal iconography, interpretations, or even recollections of childhood. Ashbery writes that "[a]n illustration changes us" (Ashbery 14); however, the line could also read, I think, that observers also change illustrations, as Ashbery has done to Darger's art. Ashbery writes not so much an ekphrasis explicating Darger's narrative, but rather his own lyric commentary on childhood, specifically on its ephemeral nature set against the backdrop of impending adulthood. If the modern ekphrasis attains to lucidity and devotion to one's art-object of poetic meditation, then according to *Girls on the Run*, the contemporary ekphrasis attains to ownership of *otherness*: the desire to own a particular experience overpowers one's desire to pay strict homage to it.

Like nymphs, Darger's Girls are forever bound into the narratives into which they are placed; owned and captured, they no longer run, but rather they stand transfixed within the boundaries of Ashbery's poem: "Let's get out of here, Judy said" (Ashbery 3). In stanza after stanza, a vague "partition" and "border" is alluded to, over which rests threatening elements such as "puberty" and "rascals," as well as allusions to death such as "night," a time when "school will be over," "sublime rest," and "extremes of aloneness." This "border" can also be read as an allusion to the border of the paintings or the books that the Girls inhabit, outside of which they do not or cannot exist; therefore, to go beyond these visual and textual borders is tantamount to going beyond the borders of life or existence. At the same time, our narrator—who comes to us with

an understanding that is both naïve and mature, an age that is placed in youth yet antiquated—realizes that he relies on traditional metaphors for death and dying:

Other dreams.
 Judy the petulant watered her flowers
 from a sprinkling can, and the rose hurtled into bloom.
 My message is it's all right to go on, it said.
 Sure enough daisies and yellowbirds paired off in the peace of the
 moment,
 which is to be lasting, but someone unearthed the old saw
 on the gravel beach. "We can't use this." No but we'll go over the top
 and down into the wrinkle on the other side, you'll see.
 So they did what was natural and becoming, and all were satisfied
 and rewarded. And some
 shall be excused, and others have to go and wait on the border for it,
 if we can believe the poets who wrote all this down many decades ago.
 And we should come nearer, it's warmer,
 if we want to, only on that other side
 which seems so far away from us, but alas is too near
 almost to count. (Ashbery 28)

This passage illustrates the mechanics of the poem at work and contains the elements that are introduced in the beginning and maintained throughout. Although the Girls are portrayed with a sense of always existing, without an origin, orphaned almost, the poem makes references to their "maker," "Mother," and "Creator"; if death is always lurking behind the Girls' flowers, then indeed, so too is a higher, mystical hand that calls the world into being, and in this case it is the poet. Here, we see the appearance of Judy (the poet does not give us enough details with which to differentiate her from the other Girls), who toys with a simile for puberty—"the rose hurtled into bloom"—the message of which is that "border crossing" is somehow, although metamorphosing, safe. Throughout the poem, random objects are unearthed or else appear from out of nowhere and seem to lend significance to a secret operation in which the Girls are

involved: here, it is the “old saw,” which could be an actual aged, cutting tool or, as in the figure of speech, an old or often-repeated tale, either of which may or may not prove useful as a means of escape. This sudden springing of objects into the narrative is synonymous with the art of writing or painting: the artist and writer, through art, has the power to make things appear at will. Time is compounded with distance: the poet wrote in measurable time (“decades ago”), yet there is also an element of inexactness and infinite uncertainty coupled with an inevitable occurrence—“that other side,” which can be read as either death or change, is described as being both “far away” and “too near almost to count.”

Writing and painting also overlap in the poem, and Ashbery seems to enjoy that he was selected by the Girls to write the poem, as if it were a new kind of visual art medium: “at a pencil fair, / when fountain pens are the color of crayons dipped in the watercolor that was used in the landscape. / We acknowledge it and go on living. This / pen is for you because you’re about twenty-four” (Ashbery 32). Of course, Ashbery, at the time he wrote the poem, was well above the age of twenty-four, but perhaps to the youthful, nymph-like Girls, twenty-four is an ancient age; it is Ashbery’s age that makes him “grown-up” in the eyes of the Girls, and thus he has the authority and know-how to write. Just as the fate of the Girls depended on the manner in which Darger painted them or wrote their stories in this novel, the poem suggests that the fate of the Girls is also connected to Ashbery’s pen and paper: “How strange it all seems lost! How white it then was! Page torn from a notebook . . . / for the end that doesn’t come any more” (Ashbery 33). The maker possesses not only the power to bring things into being, he (the poem makes clear that the “maker” is masculine) also has the power to cause things

to disappear or simply cease to continue: “crumbs fall down an airshaft, disappearing forever from view” (Ashbery 30). The Girls in Ashbery’s poem seem aware that their fates are tied to the whims of their male creators. Ashbery writes of Fred’s dog Trevor:

In time, he said, we all go under fluted covers
of this great world, with its spiral dissonances,
and then we can see, on the other side,
what rascals are up to. What games the malevolent play.
Only then we are distanced, and can relax in the great
cradle of earth’s two cents, for what it’s worth,
and can recline, looking upward to the great here and there,
even as it falls short at our feet. (Ashbery 35)

The “rascals” could be whatever is at work in the machinery of fate and death, or it could point to Darger and Ashbery, who are the Girls’ machinery of fate, writing and painting their lives, or in the case of *Girls on the Run*, rewriting the lives and deaths of the Girls. The “fluted covers” suggest either covers of a book or the sheet that is placed over a corpse. If we are to read “spiral dissonances” as being related to a spiral notebook, in addition to some meshing of voices that simply refuses to harmonize, then we must see that the “great world” is contingent upon and, in fact, relies upon and can only exist through art.

What gets complicated is that the Creator in the poem, like Darger, does not live forever; the Creator of *Girls on the Run* dies: “He complicated everything by dying. He wouldn’t hear / of it. Fate was two valleys away” (Ashbery 47). The creations outlive the Creator; moreover, the creations are, however cruelly, made aware of their fates. In order to be alive and animated, Ashbery’s poem seems to suggest that the Girls need a narrator or maker. “The world needs a narrative,” Darger once wrote (D’Agata). Darger supplies, as does Ashbery, a narrative that furthers the imaginary world of the Girls. The

Girls are only alive in so far as someone outside, that is, in the mortal world, is enchanting them by telling their story or supplying their narrative. It would appear then that what is crucial concerning Ashbery's ekphrasis is that his poem is the resuscitation of Darger's Girls, the reenchantment of the story of the Girls after Darger has gone from them. At the beginning, Henry makes a brief appearance, and the Girls seem to know that it is only through the hands of Darger that they are able to play: "What do you want me to do, said Henry, / I am no longer your serf, / and if I was I wouldn't do your bidding" (Ashbery 4). Although we are only one page into Ashbery's poem, we see that Darger is, in so far as Ashbery makes him, unavailable or unwilling to continue the narrative—hence, Ashbery's arrival to do the Girls' bidding. A few lines later, Henry⁴⁸ disappears and Dimples notices that "Inside, in the twilit nest of evening, / something was coming undone" (Ashbery 4). When Darger dies, the Girls notice that *something* disappears but not at the hand of Darger: "Now that's funny, / he was here only a moment ago. I thought I saw him go up, and out.' The flies / on the flypaper said they hadn't seen him" (Ashbery 44). Towards the end of the poem, where death materializes, this disappearance is confirmed: "He complicated everything by dying. He wouldn't hear / of it. Fate was two valleys away. Wind slithered over the sandbar" (Ashbery 47). With Henry's death, a new dimension opens suddenly to the Girls; while Henry was alive, new persons and objects were continually coming into existence—now the new appearances cease, and it becomes possible that objects and even people can simply, albeit horrifically, disappear. (The objects, Girls, and flowers and stormy landscapes do in fact disappear, when one considers how the illustrations have been separated, owned now by

⁴⁸ I am using "Henry" here and not "Darger" to denote the character "Henry" in Ashbery's poem as separate, although not so separate, from Henry Darger.

museums and art collectors.) Ashbery writes of these sudden appearances and disappearances:

Sure enough, Trevor leaped on the horizon,
causing cheerfulness to jump-start the stubborn little band of marauders.

When they awoke,
as from a dream, only a mauve magician was occupying the premises,
and he too pretended not to notice anything was amiss. This was too
much for

Laure. She pushed impatiently past the guards, on the pretext
of bringing Trevor his bowl and saucer, secretly
counting the number of clothespins that still lay scattered around the tent
threshold.

This marks the moment

when everything must be summed up or there will no longer be a way
past the mercenaries.

You see we all thought the ride would be lovely
and worth the trip, which it was, but now we cannot go anywhere
having already been everywhere. No, do you
understand how realistic it all is? (Ashbery 39)

What is more frightening than disappearances for the Girls, Ashbery intimates, is that the hand causing the disappearances is invisible. A “mauve magician,” who is introduced suddenly into the Girls’ world during their sleep, pretends not to notice that objects and persons are missing from the scenery; however, Laure knows better, and this knowledge is strangely wrapped up in the sudden reality of the scenery. Somehow, the flowers and makeshift houses are not paper and pigment, but rather they are real—the maimed and dead children with entrails revealed are not just pencil and red paint but actual book and flesh. Again, the reader is confronted by how child’s play allows the Girls to save the day: somehow, the saving gesture is related to the precise number of clothespins. Much in their world seems to be inseparable from the amount of things, like clothespins or days. They are trapped (“having already been everywhere”) within their artistic and

poetic boundaries. Lolita tells Humbert that “[t]here is no point in staying anywhere,” (*Lolita* 244), and she too, unable to reach Alaska and dying in childbirth, is unable to escape those boundaries—temporal, spatial, and literary—in which Humbert confines her. It is this inability to transcend, or rather, it is the knowledge that Darger’s Girls will someday penetrate the other realm or else be removed from the painting that makes the picture more than a picture—it causes art and reality to be one and the same, something that Darger quite seemed to believe as he worked away within his own enchantment.

If the maker’s death is caused by a hand higher than the maker’s and if the maker was until then the ultimate force in the Girls’ reality, then there opens a whole new dimension, of which they can only intuit. Suddenly, their exploits with the soldiers and their narrow escapes from bondage and drowning are no longer play. If their maker is dead, then death too will come for them: like Lolita, Alice, and Wendy, Darger’s Girls will also grow breasts and grow older. They are no longer running as a part of play, but rather they are now running from night and death. This new reality turns their play and their toys into portents: “And as far as the wires / could stretch, into the inevitable jerk-kingdom, the little girl / crawled on her hands and feet. That was no jack-in-the-box / back there, that was the real thing” (Ashbery 8). There is a danger in the real, because only in the real can they lose their lives. “Or was there a terminus, sadly, deep underground?” Ashbery writes, “This, only children can know, / and some adults who have turned the steep corner into childhood. / Plums are ripening” (Ashbery 12). The images of death and decay synthesize with the loss of adulthood and loneliness.

Ashbery intimates that the Girls are acutely aware that they are playing roles assigned to them by Henry and then later by Ashbery; however, in the *Realms of the*

Unreal, Darger seems to suggest that there is high seriousness, even a threat of death in accepting these roles, for which the Girls are prepared. He writes:

The terrifying drama of it all was overwhelming the little girl. Yet amid the chaos of clashing emotions, her ruling passion persisted. And she became agonizing aware that never before had she, nay any little girl or woman in any world's history of wars and other adventures been offered so stupendous a role to play before so vast an audience . . . Her stage, the huge devastation theater of a World Record Breaking war, Glandelinians, and Holy God Loving Abbieannia, her audience, all the world looking on from the seats and balconies of the Grand Theatre, and all Kings and Queens.

She giggled hysterically. Fascinated, yet terrified, bewildered instinct urged her to seize the opportunity, and accept everything it offered—every peril, every pang, every great sacrifice, sorrow of parting with her sisters, maybe forever, even the bony embrace of death itself . . . Comedy, melodrama, or tragedy, what did it matter, if she for the first time alone were to play the role, the supreme role of the World's History—the greatness of all heroines, the little heroines of heroines. (MacGregor 100)

The threat of death was an imminent reality for Darger's Girls, and their roles as heroines were taken with honor and high seriousness, no matter the consequences. A

quick glance through any book on Darger's paintings will reveal Girls entangled in various perils, dying grotesque deaths. The painting *At Phelanthonburg. What they saw.* (MacGregor 36) showcases Girls who are strangled to death by their male captors. Some of the paintings' titles speak for themselves: *At Jennie Richee. Having thrilling time running through a field of gutted bodies of children with shells bursting all around* (MacGregor 312) and *At Sunbeam Creek. Tied to Trees Naked in Zero Weather* (MacGregor 432). There are explosions, shootings, drownings, lynchings, crucifixions, stabbings, all occurring under skies where the ghosts of Girls sprout forth in storm clouds. The Girls are forced to witness the massacres of the other Girls who have graciously given their lives to fight on their side; moreover, some Girls are forced to kill themselves or others. These are not typical girl games. Although they are often naked with rifles ready, Darger portrays his Girls as religious and studious; they attend mass and go to school. Although Ashbery gives Darger's Girls some "adult" circumstances, it is ultimately, I think, adulthood from which the Girls are running. Ashbery gives the Girls, as if they were chic and well-to-do New Yorkers, an accountant and a therapist and lets them smoke. There exists a strange mixture of the child and the adult in the Girls, a mixture of play and serious work.

Although the Girls exist eternally youthful, transfixed forever in art, immortality for nymphs traditionally came at the cost of death. Traditionally, nymphs would rather cross into the spirit world than achieve sexual awareness, although both are types of metamorphoses. Darger's Girls are immortalized in the paintings and books precisely because they are dead, just as Daphne is forever immortalized as the laurel tree and Syrinx forever rustles as river reeds. All that comes after the Girls' deaths, like Echo, are their voices through their male creators. The Girls are threatened by the inevitability of

puberty, which seems to be the *Storm Brewing* (title of Darger painting that is featured on the cover of *Girls on the Run*) beyond the hills from which they run. Ashbery writes, “Did you read that book I was telling you about? Ach, it concerns puberty. / Do you suffer child?” (Ashbery 46). Puberty then, it would seem, is when suffering will begin for the Girls. The threat of puberty and the images of death get enveloped in metamorphosis, as if these transformations were on the brink of capturing the Girls and, like Darger, removing them from existence. “Autumn,” Ashbery writes, “comes to fondle us / with new, rich, more mature colors, just as the sun is going down / and down and down for the last time” (Ashbery 45). Perhaps their male creators are the autumn that has come to fondle them, Darger fondling them first with the “mature colors,” and now Ashbery fondling them again “just as the sun is going down.” Maturity is linked to decay (autumn) and death, with the sun setting forever. In childhood, play was play; puberty threatens everything by ascribing a reality and finality to the play. “Eternity,” wrote Heraclitus, “is a child playing.” It is time, “the concept of duration, which kills” (Ashbery 13). For the Girls, the Jack-in-the-Box will become a real scare, and the decay will begin to set in:

Plums are ripening,
 the pitcher of sangria darkens and deepens. So it was ever this way,
 until it was past time to become “normal” again. Tell it to the neutered
 pets
 that day! Already the verandas are awash with trouble, and color, the
 darts seldom miss their mark.
 Heidi and Peter dissolve in the crystal furnace;
 something says it’s too late to change, now better to let it come toward
 us, then we will see what it is made of.
 To have had a son back there . . .
 But the unthinkable is common knowledge now. We must let down a
 ladder
 so the others may attach their boats to it, and in that way we shall be

saved.
 Only I think we're . . . It's all coming nearer. (Ashbery 12)

“The unthinkable” may be a reference to puberty and death; “[p]lums are ripening” appears to be an euphemism for both puberty and decay; “normal” is the state before puberty, and the pets are “neutered” because they have yet to undergo the metamorphosis into adulthood (and, of course, the pets may be neutered because Darger drew his girls with penises when they were naked); “Heidi and Peter dissolve in the crystal furnace” seems to point to Hansel and Gretel burning the witch in the oven, yet “crystal furnace” also sounds like “chrysalis,” or the stage of metamorphosis that is commonly referred to as the “pupa” stage; “too late to change” shows the intrusion of “time” in the world of the Girls. However, there are some troublesome and puzzling elements in this passage as well. “To have had a son back there . . .” seems equally foreboding and arbitrary, yet it hints that the Girls were not engaged in mere play, that perhaps there was always an element of reality that was threatening. Whose son or more exactly, whose hypothetical son might have been birthed in whose childhood? If they are in the business of saving lives, the Girls perform the task as if they were engaged in play: “We must let down a ladder / so that the others may attach their boats to it” seems like a child’s antic, a naïve, simple, and hopeful solution to a dire and inevitable situation. In the paintings of Darger, similarly, we see the Girls escape their male pursuers by rolling themselves in rugs and letting loose a sack of mice that are meant to frighten the men. In play, children will often involve themselves in life-or-death situations; the crux here is that Darger and Ashbery are assigning the roles, inventing the situations. We see, however, a more subdued version of Darger’s illustrations in Ashbery; Darger’s Girls

“play” with rifles, while Ashbery’s combat death and adulthood with shovels, electric radios, clothespins, and peanut butter. Ashbery describes the Girls in their attempt to find the “culprit” as well as the missing others:

But as for leaving you all without a tale to tell, I would be daft,
 nay derelict, not to insist on where the others have gone. Isn’t there a
 place
 to stop, that we’ll all know about when we come to it?
 Yes there is, she said, we’ll just all have to back down
 into the gloom, and bait our hooks with peanut butter.
 Which is what they did
 and so they left home that day. (Ashbery 15 – 16)

If their method of capturing the “culprit” seems nonsensical, then perhaps the Girls are dealing with a nonsensical entity, for which they are prey. For them, disappearances, borders, incompleteness, impending adulthood, and looming death are all nonsensical occurrences that they must endure. The ending of the Girls’ tale, which is being written for them, is uncertain. Moreover, the writers of their tale (Darger and Ashbery) insist that death be a theme within the Girls’ daily dealings. Like the Lost Boys on Neverland who know that they will grow up and die if they leave the island, the Girls seem to understand that there is a boundary, beyond which they will never be able to return if crossed; the boundary’s location is unknown, yet it is nevertheless intuited. The location is intuited and not so much believed, because the admission of this boundary is, of course, an admission of death. Nevertheless, the boundary is discussed; after all, some Girls need to convince the others as to the whereabouts of Darger and the other missing children. “My dears,” writes Ashbery, “doesn’t it all seem a little suspicious to you that we are here, / unable to throw the volleyball into the adjoining courtyard?” (Ashbery 34). Play does not exist in the “adjoining courtyard” simply because play does not exist there,

and the fact that they are unable to penetrate that world is worrisome to the Girls. “It was just play, they dreamed,” writes Ashbery, “tomorrow will be another day, and different. / For after taking off from the spring, the squirrels / touch earth again and die” (Ashbery 36). Notice the past tense coupled with “play”; it *was* play, but now, given the Girls’ new awareness, it is play no longer. The squirrels do not simply disappear, they “die.”

The division between life and death is directly related to the division between male and female, at least in *Girls on the Run*. As much as the Girls are girls, Ashbery refers to them as “neutered pets.” It is not until puberty that the division between male and female will become apparent. Ashbery writes:

Yet girls and boys rolled
on together, the end was not in sight,
nor was it a division yet. Thanks, the cowboy yells are the most gratifying.
But all wondered if it wasn’t divided
from itself, and if more sleep hadn’t built up on the other side.
(Ashbery 27)

As long as the end of childhood is not in sight, then there is no division between male and female or life and death. Everything can continue in its neuter existence. Again, “cowboy yells,” the association of which is not immediately apparent, randomly intrudes on the scene. The Girls are, nevertheless, suspicious of “sleep” or death, which exists beyond the boundary. Given the fact that Ashbery is gay, one might be tempted to read Ashbery’s sexuality into the division of the sexes. David Lehman in his book *The Last Avant-Garde: The Making of the New York School of Poets* writes that Ashbery’s poetry has a tendency to embody an ambiguous subject or narrator and that, “Ashbery’s work appears sometimes to be a critique of the autobiographical impulse” but in an abstracted manner.

Furthermore, Lehman argues that this abstraction—in our case a sexually ambiguous narrator among girls—“may find the critic willing to counter, as Helen Vendler has done, that Ashbery’s poetry is a form of ‘disguised autobiography’” (Lehman 157). In his review “Lives and Art: John Ashbery and Henry Darger,” which appeared in *Jacket*, Michael Leddy writes:

The identification of insider with outsider becomes particularly poignant when we think further about Darger and Ashbery. Certainly there are artistic affinities between them—most notably their shared fascination with the primal reading-matter of comics and their collaging of found material. But I think that a deeper, more personal identification helps to account for Darger’s claim on Ashbery’s imagination. (Leddy)

We know that Ashbery was involved with the Abstract Expressionists and that he is fascinated by collage art, having made collages himself; furthermore, we know that he was fascinated by girls when he was a boy. If this is a poem where sex is neutral, it is not neutral for long—sexual awareness intrudes upon Darger’s *Girls* and possession takes place. Ashbery intimates that the capture of one of the *Girls* was also a sexual conquest:

. . . in your time the fiction we would otherwise be without
 stays and stays and finally comes to seem permanent,
 all along. It was almost twenty to six,
 they churred. Slim weasels stirred behind the chink,
 the oxymoron got his rocks off, there was hell to pay, but pay it they did,
 after which the streets absorbed the laughter and lust that had been the
 morning
 as Pamela was at last captured. (Ashbery 48)

The Girls say that without the “fiction,” they would not exist, and childhood or sexual indifference seems to be a type of fiction that “stays and stays and finally comes to seem permanent”; however, there is a clock in this scenario—it is “almost twenty to six,” almost dusk. The sun is nearly set, which in this poem means that adulthood and death are threatening. “[G]ot his rocks off” is a euphemism for ejaculation; there is confusion and lust, and Pamela is captured—the reader can only surmise that hers was a sexual capturing. After all, Ashbery tells us that the Girls were sometimes “in sordid sexual situations” (Ashbery 13).

More than being fascinated by girls, Ashbery, like Darger, also seems to have been stricken with nympholepsy. Ashbery’s nympholepsy has at its core the Arcadian desire for childhood and perhaps in this case girlhood as well. Ashbery, in reality, cannot be a girl; however, through writing, he is able to insert himself into the poem as an equally ambiguous creature. But what if there was a girl? In John D’Agata’s review of *Girls on the Run*, he cites a statement that Ashbery made in an interview:

I’m in correspondence with Mary, a girl I had a crush on all through childhood and adolescence. We had a mythical kingdom in the woods; various of our friends had castles in trees, and I was always trying to get plays that we could produce spontaneously. Then my younger brother died just around the beginning of World War II. The group dispersed for various reasons, and things were never as happy or romantic as they’d been, and my brother was no longer there. I think I’ve always been trying to get back to this mystical kingdom that Mary and I inhabited. (D’Agata)

Like Humbert Humbert who tries with Lolita to retrieve and relive his “Sublimated Riviera” that he had with Annabel Leigh, Ashbery’s fascination with Darger’s Girls, who are indeed inhabitants of a “mystical kingdom,” seems to be spurred by a nympholeptic desire. Arcadia, however, was also ruled by Chronus, or Time, and is thus vulnerable to the effects of time; time may not, in Arcadia, play out as it does outside of Arcadia, yet it is always threatening. In trying to retrieve his “mystical kingdom,” Ashbery indeed desires the Arcadian unattainable; he will not be a child again, and the childhood games and playmates he had will never reassemble themselves as they once did. Time has become more than a threat; it has invaded his existence. Perhaps this is where the collage impulse comes in to play; in collage, one can assemble disparate items, from disparate times—dead brother, lost love, childhood—and have them inhabit the same space, however artificially. One might argue that Darger, too, tried to retrieve, through his building of the alternative world of the Girls, his long-lost sister or perhaps the childhood that he was never allowed to have. The question arises as to whether or not Darger’s Girls can be classified as nymphs, and it is my contention that, because they are associated with lush and fecund landscapes, are ambiguous, and are fleeing from male possessors, they can be. They are on the verge of bursting forth—never the blossom but always the bud. They exist in that short-lived phase where they are virginal yet are hunted by male pursuers who wish to possess them. Darger wrote, “All the Gold in the Gold Mines, / All the Silver in the world, / Nay, all the world, / Cannot buy these pictures from me. / Vengeance, thee terrible vengeance / on those who steals [sic] or destroys [sic] them” (MacGregor xi). In a sense, the possession and captivity of the Girls

was of utmost importance to Darger. Ashbery, on the other hand, seems to have possessed Darger's Girls only through appropriation: through writing *Girls on the Run*, he was able to claim the Girls, to make them his. Moreover, he trespasses on another one of Darger's warnings (similar to that of Cervantes regarding *Don Quixote*), that no one should add to the story of the Vivian Girls.

Like many nymph narratives that involve an association with mortality and death, we see that in Ashbery's poem, mortality is directly connected to and a result of the passage into adulthood. Although many metaphors are introduced only to be quickly abandoned in the poem, one metaphor that returns at the poem's end is that of the dissolution of silver. Ashbery writes:

all until another day, and we can see quite clearly into the needle whose
 thread is
 waving slowly back and forth like a caterpillar, accomplishing its end.
 So may it be until the end that is eternity.

 The thread ended up on the floor,
 where threads go.
 It became a permanent thing, like silver—
 every time you polish it, a little goes away. (Ashbery 13)

The introduction of the needle, which has deathly connotations, alongside that of the caterpillar, is poignant considering that puberty and death are types of metamorphoses; the caterpillar has yet to enter its pupa stage and is not yet a sexual being, not yet a being with wings nearer to death. The threads end up on the floor, rather nonchalantly, as if the individual threads, or lives, are anonymous and without significance. Somehow, the end of the thread is approaching—little by little—and, like silver, slowly passes out of

existence. Towards the end of the poem, Ashbery picks up this thread again, so to speak:

Come, it's silver, children, the unbearable letdown
has gone under the hill to bide its time. Centuries shall pass away this
way.
When we wake up it will be over. The motor will have started up,
and peas have been planted in Wyoming. Time grabs us
again, it's terrible, for a little while. (Ashbery 50)

A few lines later, we learn that “there were further negotiations, a child lay dying, there was more other / to be sad over” (Ashbery 50). This seems to be, if not one of the most beautiful passages in *Girls on the Run*, then the most gentle and heartbreaking. The narrator’s tone here has changed to that of an almost grandmotherly spirit voice speaking from centuries and centuries into the future, reassuring that the present, although monstrous, will be lived through, although the cost is that one must also die. The “letdown” is “unbearable,” and monster time hankers on with the planting of peas and other such trifling details in the face of sure and permanent death. It does, however, sound beautiful and inviting: “Come, it’s silver, children.” No matter how inviting, the Girls are afraid of that realm into which Darger slipped, that “sublime rest” where one finds “extremes of aloneness” (Ashbery 53). “Does anyone still want to play?” someone asks (Ashbery 49).

Perhaps it is Ashbery who is asking this question and is in a way trying to make the Girls come out and play with him before night falls. The narrator is so ambiguous that one has to imagine every possibility. With so many characters that are variations of themselves, tracings and cutouts, and with so many voices intertwining within so many

different landscapes, one must not disregard a possibility. And so, here enters Ashbery's departure, or a departure in Ashbery's life told in the guise of a Darger Girl:

Sure enough, suds coursed down the boulder's slate face,
 moonflowers danced, and it was all here in a jiffy,
 the present, made up like a cadaver, but more tastefully, though not too
 much so. A raft descended the millrace
 and Lou jumped off at the prearranged moment,
 to the astonishment of many, but survived to yodel another day.
 We listened to some semiclassical music, and someone got the idea of
 hooking up
 the car's old engine to the plaster sheep on the hill.
 The effect was startling; moths buzzed in the light
 from its extraordinary vibrations. Fifteen years passed in this way.
 When it was over no one had the courage to come out into the daylight,
 or knew there was any. I fell asleep
 on a sandhill, and dreamed this, and gave it to you, and you thanked me,
 solemnly,
 but we were not permitted to associate, only to correspond, and you came
 out
 to me again, and we wished one another good afternoon, and then went
 away
 again into the fog-lit embrasure. Not that we didn't have good reason
 to do whatever we did, but the question never came up again.
 (Ashbery 40)

The persons involved in the correspondence are also ambiguous; however, one is inclined to believe that if Ashbery is not addressing a lost love, then perhaps he is addressing Darger, with whom he felt affinities. When the American Folk Art Museum held a special exhibit of Darger's works in 2002, Ashbery read *Girls on the Run* there. Leddy was in attendance and had this to say about Ashbery's affinity to Darger: "Responding to an audience question about why he choose Darger's work as a subject, Ashbery said that he didn't choose Darger. Rather, he felt that he was chosen by seeing Darger's work. The difference in Ashbery's tone here was striking—no more jokes" (Leddy). This seems to be where the special election that the Vivian Girls give to

Ashbery to write definitively on them comes from: “Write it now, Tidbit said” (Ashbery 3). The poet in the case of *Girls on the Run* is a nympholept and therefore susceptible to narcissistic and solipsistic impulses. Like the nymph Echo whose voice lingers only because of Narcissus, Darger’s Girls are unable to exist outside of their male creators and pursuers. Existing completely bound within the realms of watercolor, glue, paint, and words, they can speak only through the voices of Darger and the new appropriation artist Ashbery. They are caught in scissors, fragmented in time, cut out of their original contexts and made to exist within someone else’s dream world, on a solipsistic planet, and in a poem that is as violent, spliced and makeshift, with an ever-evasive narrative. D’Agata writes, “You’ll go on poking into *Girls on the Run*—trying to find the *in*—but you will realize, hopefully at least, that the ‘in’ you are looking for, as with any Ashbery book, is several blocks ahead, behind, in an undeveloped lot, several years away from the front door at which you are knocking” (D’Agata). The Girls’ play turns into seriousness, and their seriousness transforms into play. To enter this world, one only has to turn “the steep corner into childhood” (Ashbery 12). One only has to return to that time when one is able to believe again that “hooking up / the car’s old engine to the plaster sheep” can be a means of maintaining safety and achieving a stasis from time. For the younger ones who are still on the side where the volleyball is tossed, they will wonder where their playmates have gone: “Does anyone still want to play?” (Ashbery 49). “Fifteen years passed in this way”—it seems just long enough to be a child, and then it is over. The Arcadian dream cannot be accomplished: Ashbery seems to intimate that we are, like Darger’s Girls, “torn between the impossible alternatives of existing” (Ashbery 6). Every alternative, however, is impossible. The Vivian Girls, still children, realize that they must

escape their landscapes. Their male creators are also their possessors, and like them, we as readers do submit to a hand higher than our own that may or may not be “cutting, gluing, stitching” (Ashbery 11), changing our illustration to change us. The Girls can, like Echo, Daphne, Syrinx, and traditional nymphs, sublimate into their landscapes, unable to exist except as representations of themselves (a voice, a tree, a reed); accordingly, the Vivian Girls have been made immortal through art—frozen forever alongside their blooming flowers and butterfly wings, within their museum frames, within the contexts that art historians, psychologists, and now even poets posit for them. Do we die away; do we shed our former lives? I think that Ashbery is saying so—suddenly, the greetings no longer involve explosions, risks, shoelaces, stockades, or daisies and yellowbirds—“we wished one another good afternoon, and then went away.” It is almost as if, when one crosses the threshold into adulthood, like dying, there can be no coming back; one must pass into that ghostly existence, that “fog-lit embrasure.”

Epilogue

not merely because of the unknown that was stalking toward them

(The title of the piece as well as subsequent italicized portions that are followed by a page number are taken from J.M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*. The title is excerpted from the following: *Of course she should have roused the children at once; not merely because of the unknown that was stalking toward them, but because it was no longer good for them to sleep on a rock grown chilly* (72). When followed by "K" and a page number, the italicized portion is taken from Barrie's *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*. Some imaginings in this piece were inspired by events in Andrew Birkin's *J.M. Barrie & the Lost Boys: The Love Story that Gave Birth to Peter Pan*.)

If she lays out two spoons (two *real* spoons) and two forks (two *real* forks), will he come then to take part in a meal that is wholly *imaginary*? The food was never real, the food was never *really real* and so to send them to bed *without*, to send them to bed without a meal, hardly meant anything.

These things may fit inside a thimble: a pinch of salt, a few drops of water, the tip of a woman's ring finger. I will give you a thimble, says Wendy. I will give you a thimble so that you will know the weight of my heart. A thimble may protect against pricks, pin pricks, needle pricks, Tinkerpricks, but not hooks, never hooks. When he stabs his hook into you, you will see that his eyes are the blue of forget-me-nots—but that is Hook and not Peter—Peter who will forget you, whose eyes are the color of vague memories, the color not of sky, but rather of the semblance of sky, the color of brittle-mindedness, of corpse dressings, of forgetting.

The window was not left open; there was another boy sleeping in the bed. That is the story

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When she was two, Wendy knew she would die. The flower told her; her mother held her chest and gasped, asked for *forever*. *Two is the beginning of the end* (1). And when he stops coming for you, that is how you might know that things have *ended*. But on the island, the island made *real*, she is allowed to live after having died, because the boys would like for her mouth to remain *forever open*. *She is moving in her sleep. Her mouth opens. Oh, lovely!* (59). Peter thinks that maybe she will sing in her sleep. *Wendy, sing the kind of house you would like to have* (59). And Wendy, with her eyes still closed, sings.

that Peter doesn't like to hear; that is the story he will tell you to get you to *forget* about mothers. Oh, Wendy, if ever you hear me speak about mothers, you must think I am truly speaking about lovers until I remember you. But we aren't really, *really* married, are we? The window hasn't been left open, and there is another boy sleeping in your bed. The absence of the beloved, the replacement that is easily replaced by Peter's mother is also easily replaced by Peter himself, who will *forget* you, who will forget to love you or even to *know* you. That bandage around his head that he came home with—if it wasn't you who wrapped it around there, who dressed his wound lovingly, then it must have been another wife, another girl, another mother, another papoose who isn't you.

He will come to you in the darkest part of night when you are sleeping and play upon his pipes until you stir; he will come to you to teach you how to fly so that you may visit that dark other space there between two stars. Despite his ability to *lose* so much, despite his boyish looks, his boyish charms, he can only dress himself with skeletons, with skeleton leaves; he smells of and is made of the loam of decaying roots and branches, the rotting sap and juices of Neverland trees. And what are these? What are these? asks Mrs. Darling, who knows that these leaves, these leaves littering the nursery floor, *these leaves* aren't the leaves of earthbound trees.

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Would the death boat be made of the feathers of the Never bird? Enclose her within the rib bones of swallows. And she can strew herself, and she can sew her own self a pocket, white and satin and somewhat ecstatic. That gleaming in his eyes isn't a personal excitement; if ever, if ever I forget you, then.

The pillows insisted on one bout more, like partners who know that they will never meet again (93). You can grow up; you can grow up and up and up and wear a tie and go to the office, and when you come home, to a house that is *above* ground, she will always have something in the cradle, for she must always have something in the cradle. Someone must be in the cradle. *I should love you in a beard* (145). And two spoons and two forks and two plates will be left out for a meal that you must eat, for a meal that will no longer be *imaginary*; however, the window has been left open again, and that question, on a rather sweet subject, has not yet been spoken. He did not take Wendy's thimble but rather Mrs. Darling's. It was Mrs. Darling's kiss that he left with.

If you were to ask her, before she had ever *really* gone there, what her Neverland was like, she would have mentioned her pet wolf. She would have mentioned this as if she had *been there*. *It's a wolf with her whelps. Wendy, I do believe that's your little whelp!* (36). On the island made real, Wendy's pet wolf has no recognition of her, wanders about as if it has no need for a mother; it *is* a mother. And Wendy sometimes catches glimpses; Wendy sometimes hears it stirring about. (The *it* here may have more to do with connotations, with future imaginings,

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Old wolf: so *carnal*, all wrapped up in a kind of bestial hunger, a crossing over, all totemic and looming now. Why should he say that the little girl should *love* it? Don't you think 'tis strange? As if he wanted to suggest something about a true, albeit suppressed, nature. 'Tis not done, I'm sure, for *contrast*. So the death boat here would involve a belly of stones to weigh it down, to bring the wayward thing to drown.

with a time in the not-too-distant future when her unraveling hem—too short—will have risen, a rising tide water, way past her ankles and will not reach quite past her knees.)

The wayward thing, the wayward thing is not Wendy, but rather Tiger Lily, and *there is not a brave who would not have the wayward thing to wife* (47). But Wendy notices; she notices how Peter will go off to fight for her, will go off to reclaim her, to free her from pirate strings and pirate beams; he'll untie her with teeth, will carry her overboard, will safely stay underwater until there are no grownups in sight.

I'm a little bird, he says. *I'm a little bird that has broken out of an egg* (131). And dear Wendy, dear Wendy, who gathers all the bramble wires, the briars and twigs of the Neverland forest, who crouches down to make a little nest, who crouches down to make a little kindling for a fire, where is she to lay down this little bird who crows and crows and crows? When he talks in his sleep, he will say a name you have never known; there will be an *adventure*; there will be an *adventure without you*. When he talks in his sleep, you will know that one day, one day you will sleep and sleep and never wake, and he will go on. He will go on *without you*. Never mind that the daffodils are already a-wilting; never mind that you can no longer let out the

The Home Under Ground

We won't notice that we've grown until we've grown: that's Wendy's predicament. Hook's: he won't notice that he's dead until he's dead, and the only reason now for his dying is Peter's having discovered the art of mimicry: Peter hadn't known he was tick-tocking, tick-tocking through his teeth; he hadn't noticed the tick-tocking until he realized that the thing coming to kill him wasn't lurking underneath.

hem.

The *elegant lady of uncertain age* (96) will alight; she will alight aboard a train that carries so many years and brittle Neverland leaves with it. Oh, Wendy, who is she? Who is she? Leave out the details that occur, that occur only in the other realm: the hair gray here and there, the eyes a little less bright, the coarse hairs that just won't disappear, the soiled and soured undergarments, the curdled milk, the skin that won't pull itself tight. Oh, elegant woman of uncertain age, Peter will not *love you*—he will not love *you* in a beard, not in a corset, not in a standing room, not in a wedding dress, not in a bedroom, not when you are older than ten plus two.

So you see now he *appears* to be covered with fish scales; they're all tangled in his hair—in his head hair, in his cochlea hair, in the little tuft above his bum, in his pubis down. It was only an adventure, Wendy. It was *only*. But she knows the look of infidelity, knows the smell of a certain merlady. Who among them will live forever? Certainly not the girl who has been left at home; certainly not the girl who has been left darning socks alone. (The darning egg is really a stone.) *I'm a little bird*, he says. But he doesn't say that to just you alone. And now,

The Home Under Ground

When she gets married, she gets married in a gown with a pink sash. She'll wear it for Peter, but who will know? She'll tell her husband, she'll tell him, I've never done this—I've never done this before. But when then does there appear to be so many prickly lights, so many minute butterflies alighting on the corpse? Has Peter come then? Has Peter come to take her, to take her half the way?

the whole of the house a salt-water affair—his breath, his musk, his farts, all tinged with that certain crabby smell. I'm Wendy, she says. I'm Wendy. But it doesn't stop there: the bed all a-crusty, the floorboards all a-sandy, the bath basin all a-glittering with mermaid hair.

For now, we will just have to use what we have. The acorns can *stand in*; they can stand in for a meal. The one glass there can be passed; it can be passed round and round. Let's say there's medicine in it; let's say the tincture will bring you back if you drown. There are no other mothers; there are no other mothers around. We'll just pass Wendy round and round. She will make you a place that you didn't have before; she will make you a place that will be something to carry.

The dogwoods are opening ever-so-slowly.

(When you imagine Wendy, you must imagine her at her most lonely. She's twelve, then fourteen, then sixteen, then married. She'll leave the window open; she'll wear the same nightgown; she'll keep whispering stories, stories out the crack of the window, through

The Home Under Ground

Wendy knew, all along, that she would die. She had a song for it. *Sing us the kind of afterlife that you would like to have, oh, Wendy.* And Wendy sings. She sings the kind of afterlife that she would like to have, and in her afterlife there is her little house, and Peter and she are married—but not like before, but *more real*, in a marriage made more real, which meant that Peter, little bird, someday too would need someone to help him half way to a place hidden between two stars.

keyholes, through fissures in the ground. Whenever she hears a twig snap or the fluttering wings of moths, she'll think that Peter's back, but he's never back, at least not for her. And in her diaries, she'll write that she had never really loved anyone. Else. In her diaries, she'll write that she knew about *it* all along, knew about it but continued to love nonetheless.)

The living and the dead may always be one and the same to him. So when he kills you, he kills you so that he might be able to kill you again. And when he loves you, he loves you so that he might be able to love you again. These little acorns here: let's draw faces on them and pretend they are toy soldiers; let's make believe they are the only food we'll ever have and *save them, save them*; let's say they are poison and you are the traitor and so it is you who must eat of them; let's bury them in the ground, tonight before bed, and overnight, they'll grow and grow and one day, they'll grow so fast and tall that they'll grow out of this world and we'll cut her down and make a fort of her. And Wendy, who grew so fast and so tall, who grew so that she could live only in another world, dreams of being a little acorn, a little heartbeat.

The Home Under Ground

The Wendy girl will *live longer* than you; the Never bird will *live longer* than you; the wayward thing will be taken to wife (unlike you, who will never be *taken to wife*), and she too will *live longer* than you. Shoot her down, shoot her down, you say. And down comes the Wendy bird, and down comes the Peter bird to say *who has done this?* And you're shut up in your little house again, and all around you, the various fairy birds a-dying, a-falling away from the Neverland, hanging cocoon corpses in Never trees for the Never worm, for the Never bees.

They are, however, allowed to change, only it must be a complete change (41). Tinkerbell who had room, but who only had room for just one feeling at a time, who could only be *this* or *that*, mad or happy, jealous or content, could sometimes be brought back quite easily to life. Tink, the skeleton leaves are getting quite dirty, quite yellowed, quite wilted and your wings are all crinkled and saggy; your little light, your little light goes *out*.

Little Tink will hardly live; she'll hardly live for a season and a day. Peter, who loved her but only until a new mother came, was fond of shutting up. He was fond of shutting up Tink in her little house made of skeleton leaves. Poor Tink, who only wanted to sleep in Peter's bed again, who only wanted to love, however briefly, before she would have to die, for all fairies *have to die*, took her punishment and took it quietly and stayed shut up until Peter would *need her again*, until Peter would need her to save *his* life.

All are keeping a sharp look-out in front, but none suspects that the danger may be creeping up from behind. This shows how real the island was (47). From the look-out, if we part, if we part the branches of the willow, then we'll see that the pirate ship is docking; the pirate ship is docking by the

The Home Under Ground

A nosegay can be used for *a little girl*; a little girl should have a nosegay. A bouquet may *overwhelm*. And what might Wendy's favorites be but the offerings of spring: budding branches of dogwood, of lilac, daffodils and cherry blossoms, forsythia and magnolia, hyacinths and tulips. When the seasons change and a little fairy dies and Wendy will never be quite as *little* again, she'll leave the window open; she'll leave the window open in hopes of a little, in hopes of a little dark space that she'll sew up and sew and sew and sew.

clam-shell stone. The pirate ship is all a mass of bloody feathers, of broken bird bones. Smee, oh Smee, come down from your look-out and see how we too have prepared a little meal just for you; *just for you!* But the night is a-coming, and the night has nothing to do with pirate ships or pirate whips or pirate planks or pirate cannons or pirate stones or pirate crypts. (Oh, sink the cat. Sink the cat first. Sink the little cat first so we can see if this little trick works!) From the look-out, if we part the trees to see the stars, then we'll see that a ship is docking; a ship is docking by the clam-shell cloud. If we part the clouds to see, then we'll see a creature that breathes ever so slowly, so slowly you can't ascertain that it's even a creature at all, but you're in its belly; you're in its belly (the tick-tocking is *in a belly!*) and it won't ever, not now, not ever spit you out.

The little cake—it is *poisonous*. The little cake—it is *gorgeous*. Tootles, poor Tootles, who has never ever had a mother, wants to partake of the little cake. But it's all green now, all grown over with the green of moss and Neverland forest rot. The cake has grown; it's grown as hard as a stone. The pirates will still take it from shore to shore in hopes that the little boys will take it home for some birthday party or other, and they'll all die off, *one by one*.

The Home Under Ground

Mrs. Darling *remembered*. She remembered, but didn't quite want *to say*. She remembered, she said, *a certain Peter Pan*. *There were odd stories about him, as that when children died he went part of the way with them, so that they should not be frightened* (6). But didn't you and Peter *go all the way?* When he was with you, did he ever, ever make a promise *to stay?* The pregnancy may have only been *molar*, and the boy's second teeth may have never *come in*. So why should you fret then? Why should you fret when it is spring and the lilacs are all a-dripping *without you?*

Peter does some things to you, and after that you fit (63). For the house underground, he'll take your measurements; he'll see how tall, how wide is that tree and whether or not you'll survive without scratches, without getting stuck, going down. He'll find a tree; he'll find a tree *for you*. And then, thereafter, it will be *your tree*, all hollow on the inside. And a little bird will come and a little caterpillar will come and perhaps a little apple too will grow *for you*. Oh, Wendy, don't look now, but your dress is just a tad bit shorter *than it was when*. Do you think he'll notice? Do you think he'll notice when you droop a little, when you stoop a little, when you hunch a little on your way down? Peter does some things to you, and after that, you will want to fit; you will want to fit *forever*.

First, it will be the size of this here speck of sand, Wendy, and then, while you're asleep, that's when it will start to grow little feet. It will grow into the size of an acorn and then into something you can hold. We'll make-believe a bottle of warm milk for it; we'll make-believe

The Home Under Ground

By the fire, Wendy is a knitter, and Peter has taken to calling her *old lady*. *Ah, old lady, there is nothing more pleasant of an evening for you and me when the day's toil is over than to rest by the fire with the little ones near by* (91). She turns the heel, says, *I have now passed my best* (91). Old lady, old lady, even the fallen fruit looks more appealing than you; your chin, a wizened peach skin. Don't write down *what actually happened*; instead, write down *what you wanted to believe*. The words will crook and curl for you. So, when he says, *Yes, it is a dull beginning. I say, let us pretend that it is the end* (93), don't think he means *you* or *his love for you*; the end, after all, is something that, since the beginning, has been hovering.

the doctor's come to tidy things. But will it fly, like all of our other children, dear? It will fly, Wendy, and I'll always keep it. Here. And it will grow wild and unshaken; it will have a cloven foot and mane. My dear.

The rocking chair appears to be missing *a little something*. If you hang the birdcage there, we'll hear its singing. Keep the curtains sheer drawn over the four-poster—that's the kind of bed *I would like to have*. I will can the preserves; I will can the preserves so that come autumn, come autumn when I have hung up the dustpan, you will have this small bit of apricot to remember. Me by. I don't think I quite believe in *that* anymore, and besides, this here tooth has fallen; out; it's the last one I've needed for quite a while. I will cut the slices of apple *for you*; I will shake the grove of bramble bushes *for you*; the raspberries, too tart, too tart, I will lemon and sugar them *for you*, 'cause that is what mother has taught. My dear, did I write down all of my symptoms this morning? Has the paper been left right on our doorstep? I do believe, Wendy, I do believe that Smee has stolen it.

The Home Under Ground

And what does the message in the bottle say? It says that somewhere, somehow, new lives, new lives have sprung. And is it? Is it you, Wendy? Who has *sprung*? Why, yes. Why, yes, Peter, just now; just into this here new life now. But Hook's Jolly Roger says that someday, I will wither away, I will wither away down there, planted in a deep well in the sea. So why not then, Wendy? Why not *enjoy* this here vase of flowers? Why not serve with our serving spoon and the other silver wedding things?

At night, the tulips close ever-so-slowly.

Just throw it out, Wendy, that message in a bottle. But the little seed, I think, has stuck; the little ivy leaves, the little root shoots are *implanting*. They'll overtake the whole hull of the ship. Very carefully, Peter, you placed your little flag. On top. Now, something has come and corked it all. Up. Do you think? Do you think that the savage princess will help, will help with the uprooting of this little seed? Didn't your last will-of-the-wisp die just like this, just because of this? Little Michael will outgrow, will outgrow the bassinette. The little seed, Peter, the little seed is already wanting to climb toward the Never sea.

Tiger Lily: she has been a-tanning. Tiger Lily, Peter will come to *catch* you; he will come to hunt you; he will show your father that he knows whatever there is to know about straining a willow sap cord through the holes of your wigwam. He will, as promised, *keep her*. Warm.

Tiger Lilly: she has been a-rubbing so much of the lard of last month's boar kill on her bosom. See, there, they're all a-shiny, all a-glistening underneath the Neverland sun. Tiger

The Home Under Ground

It was not, she knew, that night had come, but something as dark as night had come. No, worse than that.

It had not come, but it sent that shiver through the sea to say that it was coming (72). The smile, the smile *should* give *something* away. If you had two of these, would you? Give one away?

Down there, the beautiful sharks have lace-clogged gills. If you drown the baby, one will come up and up. The bassinette is all a-ready, all a-loaded with the dead weight of Neverland rocks. Let's try the papoose. Let's try the papoose first if already you don't know. How.

Lily: her thong is all encrusted with the little shells from the sea shore: a little sand dollar here, a flake of fish scale, a scallop shell, a baby oyster, a clam broken into a myriad of sandy flecks, a little barnacle to show where. Tiger Lily: she doesn't shave her pubes, and they're all sticking out and out. But not too much, not very many: it's just a light crow-down feathering. And will you, Peter, will you say to her, when her father isn't looking: let's go to the lagoon, and let's play pretend that I save you right before. We drown.

And he has been gone five days now. The lost boys huddle all together by the hearth in Wendy, in Wendy's home. New stumps done grown. How, without Peter, will they pluck them out? And he has been gone five days; the pirates make frightful noises overhead. They stomp and stomp and stomp, use their very whiskers to feel out the hidden place. Who dares to light a fire or start the stove? Smee will sneeze, will sniff them all. Out. Hook: his beard all a-sooty, all thick and black and damp and curly, all sort of pubic-y. The girl Wendy, the girl Wendy, looks about for a darning stone. The curling knife, the curling knife should want to tickle your funny bone. Let me show you, girl Wendy, what this

The Home Under Ground

Wendy, she gives the quiz in past tense. *What was the colour of Mother's eyes, and so on. Wendy, you see, had been forgetting too* (67). For lovers, the past tense may signify a corrosion of both language and time. For the lost boys, it signifies only a new item washed up on the seashore and that they had forgotten, they think, to eat. What was peach cobbler like, when we had it? What was the sand-grit flavored when we baked it into a cake? Was the cake then, that one, real or pretend? It's hard to remember when chocolate here always tastes like *chocolate*, when you think *of it*. Who last blew the candle *out*? Who last turned ten?

compass, what this isinglass is for. Should you not like this bunker? Should you not like this cannon fire? I should lock you, leave you alone among our preserves of apples and cider. Smee, his fist so far down the salted fish barrel; his fist so full; he thinks no one should be *looking*.

Say, Wendy! You've white cotton panties! Rufflely and lacey. Say, are they *bloomers*, maybe? But they are her *only* pair, and they could, lately, use a *real* rather than a pretend washing. They have attracted all manner of clawing: scorpions roost there; crabbies dig there; sea turtles lay there; little hands reach up and grab there. So, sometimes, when you want to get a whiff of her, she will glare. What lately has gotten into you, old lady?

Not rum, but rather, the *miasma of night* (116); that's all the pirates drink and need to stay Alive. Over the bulwarks, they drink. And Hook, so *dejected* (117), so horribly alone. He's

The Home Under Ground

Wendy, in her song about the kind of house that she *would like to have*, sings that she would like to have *roses peeping in, you know, / And babies peeping out* (60). There were no Neverland roses. The boys all come together and agree to the latticing of the make-believe. They'll make-believe roses all around the perimeter of Wendy's home, which is a home *above ground*. But they did not want any more babies to be peeping out; they didn't want any more babies. So quickly, quite quickly they sing back to the girl Wendy, *We cannot make ourselves, you know, / 'Cos we've been made before* (60), and that, they think, will prevent Peter from the ordering of anymore babies. They could not make themselves, because they had been made before. You know; you should know. They've been *made before*.

all alone, he thinks, because no one, not even the Flint, can take on *a good form*. How shall he address the envelope? How to word the invite? Dearest Wendy—I am inviting you to sup with...Dear Wendy, your presence is ...Should he have little Tootles deliver? *Poor kind Tootles, there is danger in the air for you to-night* (44). The big thing *will happen*; it will happen just as you *step aside*. Dear Wendy, please come; Hook would like. To see. You. He takes on the third person, the third form. Her little ankles, all dirty with Neverland dust.

Dearest, I will arrange the teapots so that they are just so, just so. If the water in there is all a-murky, it's because it was collected back then; can't quite remember just when; the pond-skater all at home in it just now. As for the little tadpole—he's gone away; he's gone away into a belly. No tea, but rather; that's all we children need to stay. Alive. I do believe that there's a little mole scratching up there. A badger, a claw-y glow worm. There are tree branches and tree roots somewhere down there all a-meshed with the hair of our newborn. Get me the scissors, but the cord is up there, way up high, there between the space of those

The Home Under Ground

Come autumn, should we plant a grove of peaches and pears and red delicious? Perhaps, perhaps the food could be less *non-existent*? I think that Slightly's teeth are falling out quickly simply due to malnutrition, mal-eating. But Peter simply doesn't want to plant *anything*. Permanent, he says. Then maybe, then maybe, says Wendy, maybe we could plant some bulb flowers, some perennials so that come spring, come spring, you will know that you will have to *come for me*. And should the bulb and the bulb's offspring live quite way well into the miasma of night and some spring when I *come for* to find that you are there no more, what then? What then, girl Wendy? The spring blooms: they too will outlive. You.

two stars. Perhaps, perhaps, Peter, you could. Take. Me. Dearest, I will brew the medicine so that it is just so, just so. If you think there's a sort of metallic tinge, if you think there's a certain bitterness, it's because the root was collected way back; when; can't quite remember just; the little bean sprout all at home in it just now. Oh, look! Look! Dig up the root: it's all a-hairy! Dig up the root if already you don't know how.

The miasma, the miasma of night is between your legs, Wendy. I do say! Do you think Hook can have a *look*? *No little children love me!* (118), says he. Why, Hook. I do. I do *love you*. And that is why the answer is in the *affirmative*. You see, Wendy, I must put you in chains so that you don't fly. Away. Because you might, that is, fly away. (The line seems unconscious of her presence.) But *only*, only if you love me *only*. The plank, all slick with salt water—what if, what if I should *slip*? Johnny Corkscrew: all a-twisted and a-curved, feeling out now that certain *funny spot*. It will make you *laugh* but just a little. A second time and then a third and then the *unhappy Hook was as impotent as he was damp, and he fell forward like a cut flower* (119), his eyes all a-glistening with Neverland mist, Neverland byes. And now, oh dear!, how he

The Home Under Ground

Two is the beginning of the end (1). As in, *you* and *me*, Peter; we make *two* and the story, and the story takes on an *and then*. The Never lilacs—they too do not live. Forever. The vase water all stagnant, all murky brown now. I say, Peter, we should have *changed it*, but for your pet frog that swam there; ol'boy: even he's all dead now. *Two is the beginning of the end*. And mother's kisses, which I miss, falling one after the other, one hidden in the other, so that there was always another. *However many you discover there is always one more* (1). Tinker Bell: she's all locked up now, but when she comes out, she too will give you such a fright.

snores, how black flags and stormclouds fly.

Dear Peter,

you may *think* that when I sewed you back your shadow, that I truly did sew back your shadow, but now, I am confessing that I did not, have instead held onto it for the whole while of these years. I will slip this into my Margaret's nightie; I know, you have been a-footing about her floorboards, her satined bed. You will find it; you will, I know, look into her pockets. Dear Peter, have you even learned yet how. To read? Your little boy shadow: he *laughs like you!* He flits about, like you; he's frantic, like you; he wants to sit in my lap, like you, but sometimes, he runs away, too. Dear Peter, he has *your* eyes. I have shut him up in a drawer to save *for you*.

— I'm *Wendy*.

On a walk through the Never woods, you may encounter a certain kind of *evidence*. Tiger Lily: her footprints make little angel-hand imprints, leave a dusting like pearly oyster sand.

On a walk through the Never woods, you may indeed encounter a certain kind of evidence:

The Home Under Ground

Wendy may *like* Hook; she may have mistakenly left her pink sash out there for him to find come high tide. Hook, your belly is all a-hairy; it's a little distended there from all your whale eating. He suggests that maybe perhaps he go on a diet different from his other men; he says he should like to eat a little muscle, a little muscle with nary a beard. Wendy, grown oh-so-rebellious now from having flown out the window, says, I will dig the hole, Hook; I will start making the rounds.

Tiger Lily feet that meet with Peter Pan feet *just there*, right there betwixt that pile of Never leaves. And a strand of wet pearls; and a slick leather band; and a totem animal toy signaling something towards the Never clouds. Peter at home: ruffled feathers, a broken arrow, a smudge of red clay all down his back.

Peter, there must be some sort of *allergen*. Do you think, Peter, do you think Tink has been spreading some sort of bacterium around here? I can hardly get *out*. Of bed. She has a certain aversion to *wildwood pollen*, but the girl Wendy doesn't quite know it. Yet. The bed sheets, the blankets, the pillowcases, they're fairly misted with the spores of the Neverland forest. In a few days, there will appear there a blanket of fungus, a thicket of huckleberry bushes. Peter, you've been bringing certain critters to bed, have you? Have you, my dear? The little allergen, it's so *tiny*; it doesn't quite yet have. Hands.

The Home Under Ground

What I wanted to give you was this here little tiny piece. Of me. If it heals; if it heals *properly*, it won't leave. Such a scar. Where it's red, it's only red for just a little. While. Return soon. To normal it will. The message, the message in a bottle, hasn't been claimed by anybody, and soon, soon those pirates, a-marauding they will go; they'll rip that parchment to pieces, and who then will know? Some night, in dream, when I will have climbed the look-out, it won't be you who I see, but rather another more distant star, another darker molting of sky. And so you will lie. And I will not be there too—not in a hovel, not in a bottle, not in a happy-ending novel, not in a kitchen serving eggs for two, and certainly not in a parallel grave from you.

Let us pretend now to grow an herb garden and a fruit orchard and a vegetable patch. We'll have all manner of gourds and climbing things and things that take root, like radishes and carrots and beets. What do you say, dear Wendy? I do. Say, Peter, that *that* is a *splendid* idea! Splendid! Splendid! Splendid! I will have to *stay*. I will have to stay to see just how our crops are getting on. Getting on. And then maybe, every year, come spring, in addition to dusting your shelves, scouring your pans, and sorting out your little boy things, I can hoe and till and dig and bury all manner of seeds. But what about? What about *flowers*? Should we make a path where they will be? Lilacs and tulips—I daresay that that should just about *do it*. And each spring, when they bloom, when they bloom, Peter: you better not. Forget. Me.

Oh, dear! Something, something is making me *sneeze*. No, I do not think, I do not think that it is something from the flowerbeds or Never weeds. Do you think there is a creature in the Neverland forest that we have never chanced to meet?

So should I? Wait? Should I keep waiting here for the first star to *appear*? The elegant lady of uncertain age leans on her windowsill in wait for the first star to appear so that she may

The Home Under Ground

The treasure is buried *here*, she says. She says it as if she has said it before. But that's *yesterday's* treasure, says he. He says it as if she has said it before. I want *today's* treasure; nothing personal, Wendy. Today's treasure will not need to be rubbed down to *make it shine*; it will come out all a-gleaming, so fresh I'll be able to see my own pearly teeth. In it. So then? So then, Wendy.

wish she may, so that she might wish she might. Have. And the wish she wishes: the same as. *As soon as the door of 27 closed on Mr. and Mrs. Darling, there was a commotion in the firmament, and the smallest of all the stars in the Milky Way screamed out: "Now, Peter!"* (18). The smallest and the youngest of the stars that first cried out, how grown now is that star? Does it still urge the boy on or has it too grown glassy-eyed and old and weak? Wendy devises a plan: each night, she'll leave the window open and then alight from the 27's front door only to reenter through the side door. She'll wait then on the nursery room floor.

Meals: Mother Wendy lays down the rules. Rule No. 1: there will be no hitting back. But poor Tootles: he's too big and fat and his elbows, even when eating make-believe, push against the other boys and smack. Rule No. 2: should you have something to speak out against, politely raise your right arm and declare that you *complain of so-and-so* (88). *Is your mug empty, Slightly darling? Not quite empty, mummy* (88). I complain of Tootles, who has with his big hand, knocked over my milk mug; I will require more milk, mummy. And father, who is not sitting at the head of the table nor the foot of the table nor anywhere else; and father,

The Home Under Ground

See, Nana knows to play dead, to *play dead*. Can we all beat the game if we, if we all play dead? Maybe, we'll play instead at being *grown up*, which is, you know, quite close, quite close. We'll play that we're sticking this here glass thing in your mouth, Wendy. No matter; don't fret that it's been in your mother's and her mother's and great-grandmother's too, and soon, quite soon, so much sooner than you think, it too will be in the mouth of your daughter's and then your granddaughter's too. Oh, boy! *I'm a little bird!* I crow and crow; just for you, Wendy; just for you.

who is not sitting with a tray somewhere else alone; and father, who has not come home for several days now; the girl Wendy is left to *mother* alone. And where has father *gone to*, gone to, mummy? Can you, your brood, feed? Tootles says that he would like to be father and if he can't be father, well, then, he should like to pretend at being baby. *I don't suppose, Michael, you would let me be baby?* (89). Michael, make room, make room. Something anon is coming with smaller feet than you.

And what shall I mark today as? Is it still a summer month? Or do months too reign strange in the Never wood? I think I will in this vase here put in a little pea for each day, a little *plea* for each day here. And what size *were* mother's thighs? Peter, this, even you *should know*. Try, try to *remember*. Should I begin then to keep a journal? Let's see. Perhaps first I should write all the stories, all the stories, Peter, that attracted you to me. If I have forgotten

The Home Under Ground

Peter at it *again*: his nightly communication with the stars. You see, Wendy, they watch *me*. And if there should happen to be a silent and dreadful place, I'll tell them to fill it up, to fill it up with something. For the meanwhile, there is you, and your nightgown swishes! Oh, how it swishes like a foam! A dead white cocoon foam. You are milky and salty and sudsy, and I daresay, Wendy, that something is rising from the Neverland loam; perhaps it will be a new glowing mushroom that we can feed. To Smee. That adventure is a good one! The one in which we watch Smee turn things into other things. He'll say a great big stone is a great big tortoise: you see, Smee too can sometimes do make-believe. I daresay, Wendy, that something is rising from the Neverland loam, and I have made clothes of it; I have eaten of it; I have made communion with it: the stars, they watch *me*.

the stories, what then, what then? Why, then, you would surely leave. Me. And then maybe a few recipes for making cider and jelly so that the boys might have something other than make-believe. What's that you say, Peter? You don't know *A from Z?* (30). Very well, very well, then, *for me*.

Poor, Tink! She has been stealing Wendy's peas; they're all spilling forward, out from her lantern house; she's been trying to hide more in the abandoned nest of a Never tree, where the birds eat them, where the caterpillars eat them, where Smee has found them and eats them. Poor, Tink! She thinks that this will cause the girl Wendy to leave, to leave, but Wendy, seeing her vase so sparse, so empty, thinks, oh, well, it seems that I have been here hardly, hardly for a few days at all and so longer on stays the girl Wendy. And one night, when Peter has gone out, the Tinker Bell goes to the girl Wendy in her sleep, says, Follow

The Home Under Ground

Miss Mermaid has a fair amount of skin *showing*. Tiger Lily hardly knows just how to wear underwear. It is *vulgar*—she thinks is something that mother might say. And poor Tink, Peter has locked her up *again!* Peter has ordered that she be sent away into her little skeleton cage for five nights and six days, *again!* And her little life—so short!—being spent away all locked up in her Never cage. Dearest Tink, should you and I together *unionize* against the Peter? Equal pay for equal work, we'll say. We'll say. Because we don't like those times when he plays at *favorites*, at least not with any one else. We would all like some *benefits*, we'll say. And what about *old age?* Have you, Peter, a pension plan for us? Shall there be a point system for how many times you'll come to visit? Well, except for poor Tink who'll be dead sometime before the end of this year.

me, Wendy. Peter's in trouble. And so follows the girl Wendy.

Who among us has got the syphilis? The medicine. I think we do have a medicine for it; no, wait; this one here is for the tetanus and was administered last to Slightly who complained of Curly, Curly having stabbed him with his dinner fork. I do complain of itchy crotch, says Tootles. I do complain. And all around, the lost boys are a-raising their hands; we *do* complain. I complain of pus and of the scurvy. Yes, yes, we do. We do complain. Let us then pretend that a new medicine has been sent. Let us say that, once taken, it will cure in precisely an hour and a day. You see, boys, says Wendy, what you need are *oranges*. Yes,

The Home Under Ground

The weather, I think, must be changing. Was it, when we left, the cusp of summer and autumn? The smell of snow now. Nana, Nana, Nana, have you still the best ears? It's not your fault that a boy could be so quick, *so quick!* The Peter has such a magical flick of the wrist. Oh, Nana, are you, just now, prancing in the snow? My coat, I can see it, hanging in the wardrobe. Oh, was it black? Or maybe red. Or maybe. Do you think it will, this year, fit me? Nana, don't you daresay, at my homecoming, that I have *grown*. There will be no talk about my *growing*. I will still sleep in the nursery bed; Mother must let me! And, oh dear, don't tell anybody about how I have stolen every thimble in town. When a cusp is full, it is full to brimming. (Nana, Nana, Nana, I'll secure my feminine diaper to you; I'll say that you are the one who is menstruating!) The smell of snow now; acorns all about my feet.

Wendy, we have lately been getting them from the Tiger Lily. See here, a whole barrelful full. But when it's the girl Wendy who lies ill, will you, Slightly, again then play at being doctor? Tootles, again, complains of Peter; Tootles would like to play at being doctor.

Sometimes, though not often, he had dreams, and they were more painful than the dreams of other boys (110). So let us see then, Peter, how will you fare when there is no one here to *wake you*? You will dizzy yourself with thinking of how you came *to be*. Here. And what if really no one should *love* you? Perhaps if we imagine a certain scenario: let us say that Peter did not cheat, and he's been carousing because he knows yet pretends not to know that Wendy will one day become *outgrown*. Let us say that the Wendy girl is the one he loves and that he loves her *alone*. And so, when he comes home, to a home that is under ground and laughs when there is want to weep and sleeps above the coverlet when there is want of the girl Wendy, then we know that it is because he dreams the dreams that are not the dreams of other boys. His dreams are *his* and *his alone*. Wendy, I say that one day, you will stop coming to me when

The Home Under Ground

Wendy sews Peter a blanket made of skeleton leaves; it matches his clothes; it will keep. Warm. His little feet. It's getting *colder*, I think. I can smell it, I think, the Never snow, the bare Never trees. And will you leave me here with my stove all make-believe, my make-believe chimney? It's so cold, so cold, and my house all slatty and lattacey. The morning glories, the snap peas, the various gourds done finished creeping, and still, and still the wind's let in when it blows. Something, somewhere is getting *older*, I think. I can smell it, I think, the rusty hair, the brittle feet, an eggshell that's been left, that's been left in an abandoned nest alone.

it's dark and it's nighter than night and the pirates have been a-wanting to kill me and something dead and dreadful too—wanting. To kill me. The dawn now, all the color of yams of carrots of radishes of rhubarb of beets. All down by the mermaid lake, all along the trail of teepees, all along the shore where the pirates make a fire and bake us a pretty cake, I didn't leave. I didn't leave even one imprint of my little feet. This, Wendy, you must believe.

And when the eclipse comes upon the island here, will you, like the other animals and creeping things, go into hiding? According to the star charts I have seen, it will occur on precisely the 16th of some month or other. But how do you know? How do you know, Wendy? It is only according to the star charts that I have *seen*. It must have been glimpsed

The Home Under Ground

He will not *thimble* you, girl Wendy. He has something else *to give*. What is that you say? That something has come *undone*? Undone? Perhaps it is merely bootstraps; perhaps it is a food wrap; (perhaps he's brought something sweet and delicate just for you!; a Linzer tart?; perhaps; perhaps!; perhaps he's got a little kitty grave just *for you!*); perhaps it was only the unbuckling of sky. And how long have you been counting seconds to see, to see just how long this would. Last? Surely the cake done baked by now. By now, the chicken has surely been de-feathered, all the shrimp neatly de-veined. Wendy, you see, I will give you *real* food to eat, but first, do you have something sweet for Jas Hook to drink? He will lay. He will lay certain things all out, all out: a pitcher with a spout, a bit of bratwurst, a gravy boat, a herring bone. By now, the sky done rent into a hundred pieces; by now, the lost boys, Mrs. Darling, the little bird all must be wondering why she isn't home.

when I was still on the other side of things. She does not mention the compass, the cutlass, the astrolabe, or the other instruments of navigating the sea.

I will sew a Never quilt *for you*; I will sweep the floor *for you*; I will dust the cupboards, empty the waste basket, shake the rugs and bang the dust out of the mattress *for you*. I will clear the cobwebs, water your flowerbeds, sweep the hearth, polish the silver *for you*. I will ready the bath, do the wash, hang it all out on the Never trees *for you*. And should I frame a picture? A picture of me? Keep still. Keep still here. I've something in a thimble *for you*. Mementos: a lock of Peter hair, some Neverland sand, and should I try, should I try to swipe some fairy dust from the palm of your hand? So later some night when I am quite grown and alone I can try to fly. Back?

The Home Under Ground

Do you sense, dear, a certain *something*? Like a hand that keeps? That keeps on *interfering*? I wonder what would happen if not. Would we still all be here, free to do and choose? Then, I choose you, Peter, you of the pearl teeth, you of the skeleton leaves, you of the mourning doves. See, Tootles has to go. He has to go peepee, and that isn't, I daresay, *in the story*. He'll not climb out of the house under ground, but rather he'll just pee in that ole corner there and some of the pee will come and splash up on his feet and then he'll just return to bed and go to sleep as *if*, as if he didn't just pee on his floor, as if he didn't have any pee on his feet. Or take the baby—Michael lately has taken to sticking his finger up his pooper hole and then up his nose: that certainly isn't going to make it *in*. I daresay: there *is* a certain hand *intervening*.

Oh, what, oh what *can* we do if we haven't got a thing to do? Why, you can help me wash your bearsuits, says Wendy. But the lost boys protest: they haven't taken off their bearsuits since. Don't you think, says Wendy, don't you think there is something strange and cruel about Peter making you. Wear them? Especially in this here August heat? But the lost boys, what can they say? They haven't known; they haven't ever known. They only do what Peter says. And Tootles, poor Tootles, who always misses an adventure, Tootles, we all know when his belly has a little grown; his bearsuit fairly stretches tightly over his tummy. I complain of Peter, he says, who makes us wear these bearsuits, but none of the other boys join in.

The Home Under Ground

Don't let the Peter bird fool you (*fool you!*): he indeed knows how to read. *A certain code.* There are *certain books* for the learning in *his library*. But you haven't the key; you haven't the right words. Don't let the Peter bird fool you: he already knows that you will end in a realm of forgetfulness. You, the girl Wendy, no more useful than the rings on a Never tree, the rings on the oldest of the oldest Never tree even; you, the Wendy girl, no more useful than the layers of Never sediment, the husks of Never lobsters, the new year conch shell grown a little larger now. The little hermit crabs say that they too have buried themselves below ground; they too have peeled off an old skin; they too will need a new home now that they too done grown, done grown. The old fur doesn't fit; doesn't fit anymore, Wendy girl. And all your books and all your stories, why mother is taking them; she's taking them to some orphanage for girls. And Peter loved you for them and for them only. Somewhere in the Never trees: your old skin, your old skin in the wind done blown.

(And how many children has she, has she? Let's see, there's Tootles and Nibs and Slightly and Curly and then the Twins. And Peter is the daddy and come lately are Michael and John, with Michael being the baby. And the tree underneath which they sleep curls and curves like an English sycamore, but not really. Not really.)

How cruel, how cruel he has been to Nana. He has placed the whole of his medicine in her drinking pan, and she will have to drink lest she get thirsty and what then? Mr. Darling: all in a flummox simply because, well, of *anything* really. (My dear, says Mrs. Darling, I just don't

The Home Under Ground

The girl's hair now so wild, all a mess of corn silk from a baby corn flush plucked. They've stolen a mess of them yesterday from the field of braves. Ole Tootles having a time. And the cow that lately wandered here being whetted for milk, and the twins turn-taking with the butter churn. Ole Tootles having a time with so much crème. He thinks he remembers something now about mothers. I do believe, Wendy, says he, pulling down on a teat, I do believe that I recall something about mothers; his bearsuit all foamy. But Wendy doesn't dare tell him; leaves him to quite believe what he pleases. The milk pail all salty and frothy by now. I do say, with all this teating and butter pounding that we've all taken on a rosy complexion; why our cheeks are quite the picture of strawberries and crème, which reminds me. Better take care of that skin, an old lady once told me. Someday, the girl Wendy's hair taking on a dried brittle cornhusk quality; the sun a big, burning something sunk down in the corn field; a Never piglet lost its mother, and a Never locust and a Never katydid circling something fierce; a dark pirate song miasma creeping in. It's about time. It's about time, says the girl Wendy, that we go in.

think I would like to, here, incorporate *anything* that the critics have got to say.) Mr. Darling: all in a flummox simply because. *Some men would have resented her being able to do it so easily* (13), but it was all a bit second nature to Mrs. Darling, all this knot tying: thirteen types of knot tie could she: the reef, the figure eight, the bowline, the sheet bend, the clove hitch, the common whipping, the butterfly, the eye splice, the oysterman's stopper, the single hitch, the thief, the thumb, the true lovers. She had, after all, learned how to do so from a certain sea cook, a Jas Hook, who she simply, as time wore on, called James. James, James, Darling James. James, James who didn't seem to mind it too much when her nightgown outgrown. *This* man now: all a sorry excuse for one. His tie won't tie he says and if his tie won't tie well then he simply won't be able to go to dinner tonight and if he isn't able to go to dinner tonight well then he won't be able to go to the office and if he isn't able to go to the office well then he'll lose his job and if he loses his job well then we'll all be out on the streets and we will all starve (13). All of this, to him, is a great *adventure*. And that is why, to him, Nana simply can't be nurse, can't any longer at night be brought in. With the children, he will try

The Home Under Ground

Skylights: he didn't *last* long. How long was he there? I think it must have been the space of three sentences. But that is the storyteller's way—to kill simply to show you how it is done. The body kicked aside, the cigars unmoved (46), and the pirates simply keep on, keep on. That is what the storyteller has done, Wendy. (You didn't last *long*: the space of a *story*. If ever you think that the Hook is doing something or that Peter is doing something, you must remember that it is the storyteller who is doing something.) Morgan Skylights: we don't quite know anything else. And the pirates and the storyteller move on, move on. Skylights: he gave one screech.

to play about in the nursery; he'll hoist young Michael on his back and play at sailing through the air, but that has, to the children, who lately have learned to fly, become oh-so-boring. But we are romping! We are *romping!* says Mr. Darling. Oh dear, oh dear, thinks Mrs. Darling, perhaps *ever after* should not happen, should never have happened *here*. She will show him the shadow; she will keep the shadow to her bodice pinned. He looks rather like a scoundrel, Mr. Darling says (14). He has the look of a scoundrel about him. Uh huh, says Mrs. Darling, that's him! That's him!

Something surely turning out strange with the formatting. Can't quite seem to get the space just right. The spacing quite off and these two stars here too far apart, not quite where they

The Home Under Ground

The crocodile too, passes, passes, moves on. You could, you know, smother. The tiny sound with leaves. That's how quiet the sound of it was on the island. That's how come the little peas kept *disappearing*, and why, and why each new leaf showing on the Never trees were carrying a semblance of *just having been there all along*. (Why? Why don't you talk, Peter, about your dead brother? I think that's the story *we would like to hear!* And see how you've even adopted his stance, his gait, his habit of playing pipes, that certain twitch in your ears.) Wendy will find her way by *following*. The beast will lead her to Jas. Hook, always. He will call her *my beauty* (121). But it is much more interesting to think of the gagging: *he was so frightfully distingué, that she was too fascinated to cry out. She was only a little girl* (107). Hook fingering a stack of cards; Wendy's finger on the dirty glass, inscribing: *dirty pig, dirty pig* (121). She, like her boys, staring only at the plank. Give them, Wendy; give them a mother's last Wishes.

should be. It's happening all over I do believe. But do not despair—do not ever despair. If this here storyteller isn't quite right, why then, another, I do believe will shortly come. It's been known to happen. It's been know to happen, my dear. That's great, Wendy, because I do believe that I don't quite like *this* storyteller. I do think, Wendy, that I would like to hear one of your stories. Make it a story with *us* in it, something that I can't quite remember. Make it an *adventure*, Wendy.

Do you know the difference between real and make-believe? The Peter bird does not. He can have make-believe sex and think he's having real sex, and that is what is so great about the Peter bird. You haven't to worry about all that chaffing. And that, I think, is why the Tiger Lily has never gotten. Their make-believe is pretty amazing, but don't tell Peter that I told you that. What's that you say? He doesn't do it to you *make-believe*? Well, then, that would explain it then; that would explain *many* things. Attachment, for instance.

The Home Under Ground

You see, Wendy, I can take you part of the way, but I won't go *all the way*. With you. I will do this so that you will be *less afraid*. There will come a time, Wendy; there will come a time when even father will talk less and less to you, but you needn't sulk and hide in your room all day. That will just be the way it is; that is just his way. You needn't wait for me anymore all day. Oh, yes, you see, it is quite *dense*, but haven't you? Haven't you a good writing day, Wendy? I am only *quite sorry*, so sorry that this drawer won't open anymore. I daresay that something of me is tucked up inside of it. And I know. I know it isn't a matter of having a key or prying.

Did you know that the little shells are breaking? It's about that time when the shells start breaking. New birds done hatched, done grown, done flown. They've hardly anything in their newborn food sacs; they're still waiting to grow a belly. Here too, a gale that will come and kill them. All. Tomorrow, we'll find them all crushed on the Never ground, and Nibs can calculate how many, how many. Perhaps we'll take to playing doctor and stick a glass thing in. Glass thing will say they're dying. Or about to. Too dark, today even, for the tulips to open. They don't quite believe in spring just yet, just yet. And a new moon tonight and a dark wave there and a Jolly Roger shadow cast here and there and everywhere. And ole Smee there up in the look out—his mind not quite right; he'll do it; he'll do it so that it won't matter to him a bit. Do we even have a washing board and a basin to wash our

The Home Under Ground

We might, in fact, *die here*, says he. That is the one thing that isn't quite on this island make-believe. Sometimes, you did find a body that you didn't dare go near. Even the Never flies, then, partaking of a real feast. And have you held someone else? Like this? Like how you're holding me? When the tidewater comes, the girl Wendy will sink. Or the sharks will come; the sharks too are not make-believe. Who among us will live forever? Why then should the kite come? For me? Because you make a great toast, Wendy, and all the world would like to have some of your toast and a bit of jelly. I believe a mother is someone who always contains two things. In your case: a little cat and some water. And already, is it Tuesday? That means it is a day for going into the weather to your office, my dear. And your salary will feed and feed and feed; that is where food and babies come from, come from. Don't you think, Wendy, that it is a strange and demonic thing: in the theatre, grown women play at being *me*? That's disgusting, says Wendy.

clothes in? I suppose, I suppose we'll all just have to go around all stinky until we die. Little cocoons are breaking. Red turnips in my hands have come up too early and are breaking. The Never badger, the Never mole, I daresay they're trying to dig their way in! Should we, with these sticks, poke them? You ought not to judge anyone; who's to say they're not dreaming a little dream, too? A mushroom head here, a celery stalk there, three new baby bird graves, a fiddlehead here; places in the earth are breaking.

By the fireplace, Wendy is telling stories. Wendy is a storyteller. Do you think, Peter, that one day, you will get bored with my stories and then send me on home? Send me packing? Tinker Bell's little light dimming now. To think: I've been here the whole of a fairy's life. And you will remember her, only *vaguely, vaguely*. A new game now: no adventures you say. On the toadstool, you are only *sitting, sitting*. *That*, you say, is an adventure, Wendy. Are you, dear bird, losing *interest, interest*? I will undo a bad hem *for you*; I will roll out dough and make fresh noodles *for you*; I will nurse the fresh wound *for you*; I will remember the new adventure and later tell it *for you*. And Slightly, poor Slightly, who has been trying so very hard to be just like you—can you, do you think you can just this once *let him*? The poor boy, he can hardly take one more scolding. The babes are all bathed and powdered and smuggled up in

The Home Under Ground

There is nothing at all about this that is *haunting*. The toy goat will, however, *come alive*. But that should not be so terribly *haunting*. That anything at all should *come alive* should be *haunting*. It is a wicked thing, a very wicked thing to think: someone up there scaring us all and all of the time, too. Don't quite give up just now: you see, this is the part that ought to be *easy*.

their little beds; they're make-believing at being quiet and asleep *for you*. Because when the babes are all put to their beds, well then, the mother and the father can tell each other *stories*.
Oh, Wendy, have I got a story for you!

Was there, before this one, a home like mine? How many times have the boys made a house for a girl before? I daresay, they did seem awfully adept *at it*. There must have been a home like mine somewhere permanently now fixed in a photograph—its old ghost bricks somehow haunting here, a certain smell of rot climbing the trellis. Old skins, old skins: which one do you have the mind to try? On? How they hang like nightgowns on the clothesline. Was there, before this one, a hole like mine? How many times have you made your home in a girl before? I daresay, you did seem awfully adept *at it*. There must have been a something like mine somewhere. She too in a locket I'm sure to dig up. Old skins, old skins: which one Peter do you have the mind to try? My old nightgown: my old nightgown once held. You.

The Home Under Ground

It's only a matter of making it *come out*, into *being*. And if you don't like it, if you don't like it then, why then you just put a little shroud on it, bury it, and in a few days, it will pop out all new and naked again. That is one way you can care for babies, if you don't know how. I complain of Peter who has *buried me*. There is something oh-so-ghostly about this way of loving, don't you think? Let us pretend it is the end, already? Why, the muffins have hardly been in for ten seconds. Or has it been? Minutes? I hardly know anything much about all of that passing and passage now. Oh, Wendy! They've been in for days and days and days: count your peas, count them, count them.

Were you locked out? *Quite* locked out? From eggshell camp to mother to the gardens—none of the birds quite *wanting you*. And will you survive quite narrowly because of the sleeve of your nursery night gown? I've a hunch, Peter; I've a hunch that you're so forgetful simply because you're so old. Grandpa was that way, too, always calling me by mother's name, just like you. The story, the story that will *make you* remember—shall I, shall I tell it to you? (Peter, I just have to say that I don't know really if any of this is *any good*.) And if I had grown to be more petite, would it have been possible to have easily tricked you into thinking that I *could still*? Oh dear, the kite tail isn't quite long enough; these limbs don't quite curl into the nest just right anymore; and hollow tree to the home under ground—even, even if I suck it in. Oh, dear, *perambulator*: they make it sound as if it's a machine, as if something in there is *happening*—darling baby needs to *perambulate*. Darling chickens, count your chickens. How dare they take? I'd rather keep my little Peter egg here. And which hen am I? And how many did you take?

But that question on a rather sweet subject *has been spoken*. Prior to having vanished to Neverland, our Betwixt-and-Between resided in Kensington Gardens and loved, quite

The Home Under Ground

You've gone and forgotten all about your muffins, and you'll now make excuses and say well then they were only make-believe, but we all know better: a fire and smoke that's been here for days and days. See, little Michael here has got the black lung. Old Tinker: her wings all soiled and singed. Tootles with a mess of burnt knees. Charcoal in Slightly's hair; ashes everywhere. You see what comes, Wendy, from your make-believe?

deeply, a girl by the name of Maimie Mannering. It was she that he indeed asked to marry. He wanted her to *teach him* how to be afraid, how to thimble, how to play. They will love you, says Peter; they will, like me, love you; you're like a bird's nest, and oh how I do love to stroke the fur on your pelisse, Maimie; he thimble her all the way.

The Maimie girl was wicked, quite wicked. It was a wicked thing of her to do what she did in the dark. To her brother: *Oh, look at it, Tony! It is feeling your bed with its horns—it is boring for you, O Tony, oh!* (K 42). To keep her quite alive, a night-light is put in; a saucer is put in; chimney smoke is put in; a scraper and door-mat and a door handle are put in; hot and cold are put in; and lastly, quite lastly, the forcing-houses are put in. So that in less than five minutes.

The Home Under Ground

It must be way past spring: the marigolds now at the peak of their *blooming*. And still, and still, he has yet to come. For me. Perhaps he has found already another *leading lady*. Yes, I do believe. And how will you say this line here? Will you, will you put some tears in it? Oh, Peter, oh Peter, darling? Has someone else, so suddenly, become a servant for you? Let you tie her up so that the tying leaves marks that can only mean she's been with you? It was quite erotic, no? You, me, some twine, the totem pole. Something now telling me that with Tiger Lily it's all been done *before*. The rose blooms: already gone. To seed. To seed. And still, you have not come. For me. Who among us will live forever? Certainly not. Certainly not me. In Kensington Gardens, another dead babe, and no Peter goat and no fairies. From this side of the window, I can see how your world looks so bright, so bright.

Funny that you should have *forgotten* how to read, says Wendy. I am certain that I have heard stories about a certain someone who used to leave you treats along with letters detailing *how to use them*. And where, just where, have you? Put your goat? The one that *she* gave you? Is it true? Is it true that it's only because? She does, yes, Wendy, remind. Me of you. I meant the reverse; I go that way. Sometimes. You must know that it is because of the island.

Who first had the fur? Collar? Pelisse? Can't we just pretend? Can't we just pretend that everything is new and for the first time first? And really now: why *get married* when you can have so many, so many? (You can *choose!*) You can't sleep here anymore; it's really throwing off everything. I know a certain sheep who shan't like to be sheared. Anymore. It quite rightly will sulk into hiding when it sees those shearing scissors criss-crossing. Night now for me like that, too. (I know what you're thinking: which child will you now steal to make your next book quite right?) "*I do wish you would teach me how to be afraid, Maimie,*" he said (K 59). Maimie? asks Wendy. Who is Maimie? Never mind all of that now: your chest cold is a-clanking. It's a real one: Tiger Lily gave it me.

The Home Under Ground

Shoreline forgets; marauders forget; empty vial forgets; old crocodile—he *never* forgets; clamshell forgets; old spoon forgets; seasons forget; old lilac bloom all gone to seed now and forgets; even the fat storm cloud gets so lazy with forgetting and forgets; old bedroom forgets—forgot to be what it ought to be (where's the roses all trellising up and the babes peeping in, peeping in?); old bones never forget; old shadow *never forgets*—wants to *go back, go back*; space there between two stars never forgets—wants to swallow you, whole and forever, won't let you ever *go back, go back*.

I say, Peter, I should like to return to a scene that is more *domestic*—no more of this highfaluting hand-of-the-creator thing. I don't quite like him, shouldn't like to meet him. And besides, I'm not quite so sure I like the way he *looks* at me. I'm sorry for the burnt biscuits, the blackened oven, the charred bird; it's just that I know how quickly you run to smoke when you see Tiger Lily's. I should like some berry juice, too, you know. You know. You shouldn't keep on smashing it up just *for her*. She's plenty of braves to be making juice for. Something quite strange, Peter: how you put it in. I complain of Peter, who doesn't quite know *how to put it in*. *He didn't even know how a father does till I showed him* (89). And now you've gone and put too much frosting on your cinnamon bun. But which one *are you?* says he.

Let us start a Daily Gazette, says she, so that we'll be able to archive all of our adventures. Good idea. Good idea. But say, Wendy, none of us on the island have ever learned *to read*, excepting Hook, and well then, he'll know all of our secrets and what then? For Peter, however, it has little to do with Hook and more to do with the dreams of the future

The Home Under Ground

Peter, Peter, my bed here is *sinking*, and the kite isn't coming. I daresay it *isn't coming*. Will I too shine so bright and suddenly and urge you, urge you on and in? Will you, even though I'm quite so grown, take me still part of the way? But then, what then? I didn't quite expect that the story would end. This way. Who now is brushing the brambles from your hair and boy skin? Who now administers your medicine? Who now is dressing your wounds, attending to your scabs, forgiving your sins? Does she, like me, cherish each and every little pea?

generations of children who may know too much about what the island brings. I say, Wendy, you shan't write; you shan't write a thing. We shall just carry on *like this*—with a storytelling of things that *may* or *may not* be.

What then will you do to lure me when I have already figured out that those things with which you brought me here turned out to be your playthings: the fairies, the papoose, the mermaids, why, even the mother of the whelpings. *My* pet wolf! Indeed. Will you then invent another *girlthing*? Perhaps you'll say *ponies*, but that's terribly old-fashioned now, little birdie. Girls now, well, we'd like something a bit more *flashy*.

Old parrot now repeating. Things I've said. It'll circle the island bringing news, bringing news of who's dying, who's dead. I don't like that thing—barking all day. If you don't like

The Home Under Ground

Perhaps kite *forgets*. After all, even mothers *forget*; little girls *forget*; Peter, too, *forgets*. That's the way it will end: it will end simply because someone *forgets*—especially now that we're forbidden to write anything down. There's a bird living in the eaves; I hadn't before noticed. It doesn't sing—not even one pretty song for me. Maybe it has forgotten the songs, or maybe, better yet, maybe it's a little boy who scratched too much where it itched, and the bristling feathers done come and come. You, too, Wendy, don't forget: you too were once a little bird, but by now you've quite *forgotten* everything about that. How many eggs do you think this here basket *will hold*? A dozen, surely. Surely. But maybe, maybe not. I hardly know: how much weighs an egg? I'm much heavier these days, I do think—not so light anymore. Perhaps the kite, even if it did remember, could not carry me away anyway.

something, Wendy, just kill it. If you kill it, it won't bother you anymore, and then you'll be able to write without all of that terrible noise and disturbance. But what if I try to kill it and it doesn't die and it just flies back to Hook and speaks of the terrible thing that I have just done? But which is worse, Wendy, that or having it tell the whole of the island how you took turns with braves, all of them, one by one? I only went, she said; I only went to tell them to stop calling me a squaw. Of course, Wendy; oh, but, yes, that *is* old news by now; I do say that is quite *old* news now: Tiger Lily howled of it all night; Tiger Lily swore vengeance. But will we know, Wendy? Will we know when the baby is born, which one it belongs to? Big storm cloud coming in from the West, all spectacular and island bound. The rain will put the Hook in a frenzy; onboard, it will make slip little feet. Or maybe this will be the perfect night for them to bury the booty, to rid the ship of its *evidence*.

Peter, you must know. You must know that I loved you only and most of all and that is why I laid out the milk and the cheese-cakes and the butter and honey and complained that the braves had been referring to me as a squaw. I suppose; I suppose that on most days I am *happy*; it's just on those nights when you have only given me make-believe tea and then I

The Home Under Ground

I think it's about time that we've let these things *go* now. Tulips all gone to wilt now. Porcupine done gone to sleep now—that's one animal that's definitely *not* funny, not funny at all. Have you a *bole*? In your pocket? See, I'll take out my housewife and make it all better. Do you get a certain strangling sensation upon seeing this box? It's merely a *housewife*, that's all. But it's about time, I think, that we've let these things go now. Little house all dusty and crumbling now. Fake roses all a-dying.

don't see you again for days that I want to go. And because there really is no place to go, I go to Hook who knows how to *tickle* things. You see: there's a smile on my face before long! And besides: he's real apples, real figs, real plums. He'll make me a little doll with a corn cob, a little Johnny cake with sugar and meal, and he'll even take my measurements so that I will fit even though I might have grown. He doesn't even mind a little bit of blood. The moon, all *sassy* now.

Don't you think this little exchange here is *getting old*? I complain of this exchange, Tootles says, which is getting quite old. Let us take a survey then and see just how we can continue on here without having to reinvent too much. Or, better yet, let's take a test and ascertain just what has transpired so that we can make it all new again. True or False: When I arrived here, I had gray in my hair. Question 2 (fill in the blank): The Never bird saved Peter with her _____. Quite unfair. Quite unfair, Wendy, to the Peter bird—he's so old and senile. You know he won't remember a thing. You know this about him, lady! Why do you insist on making him remember that you two did it? I think he's quite over *that* now. Of

The Home Under Ground

Winter coming now. And have you bearsuits for me and John and baby Michael? Are there even any baby bears *left* to kill? Oh, bears gone into their sleeping caves by now. They might have come, I think, to eat us anyway. Never mind that scarf, Peter; it's all full of your dead fairy folk—that's why it glistens and sparkles so, and that is how I will fly back to mother; I'll shake out little bits of fairy dust at a time until I'm quite home and will you miss me then? And will you speak on *it* then? And will you ask a certain question on a rather sweet subject *then*?

course, you are quite nice; of course, you are loving; why then some days do you wake up with so much venom? I do say, Wendy, it is not ladylike, you know. It isn't like a mother should. I say that you make it up; I say that you make us pancakes.

Hook pricks all over my spine I've. I'll stay in bed and complain of a *sickness*; if asked, I'll say that the Tinker Bell has *done this*. She did it out of jealousy. Maybe he'll think I'm gravely ill, that another thimble will save. Me.

Maybe she's too obsessed with something else to make the story what it should be. Why, yes, Tootles, I have noticed that lately, lately she's taken to spinning heaps of wool from the Never sheep. And where have they come from, come from? New sheep done sprung? And a spinning wheel too has come from out of nowhere? 'Tis were imagined, *imagined*. Why

The Home Under Ground

Hollyhocks blooming all up the side of the trellis, so heavy they need to be tied back lest they droop and break. Neverland earth so rich it will grow anything. Out to the heavens. And so I hold so tightly my little bean lest it escape, implant itself, and fly away from me. Something sinister washed up on the seashore saying *too late, too late*. What is a girl to do? One who is a very little one? Maybe a doctor, a *real* doctor, will come? Will come? Old Hook: all lying with *his* black bag and stethoscope: no real thermometer *in there*. I say, Hook, I say, I do think I'm coming down with *something*. A little bird; a little bird. Do you think that *for this* it's possible for you to bake me a little cake? Or does it not work that way? Tell me: how do you tell time when your instruments, your landscape keeps changing? The astrolabe says something in conflict with the stars.

take to spinning and leave your boys, and leave your boys to play baa baa black sheep? (I do say that *something's* in the hay!) Ooh ooh ooh, says Tootles, do you think, do you think the girl Wendy is spinning us suits, new sheep suits, and we can finally change out of these here old bearsuits? Why, kill a sheep first and see if it fits, if it fits *true*, and then go and see what Peter will say to you; none of the boys, however, are quite that brave; none want to be chased out and away from the Neverland because *chasing* quite means a *disappearance*.

Happened once to an old Never monarch; old butterfly never quite said the right words to the Peter bird, who quite made the thing disappear simply. OOooooohhhh, ooooohhh, get this, get this, Tootles says, I asked her, and she says that she quite intends, she quite intends to stay on *through the winter* and to the spring, and that is why, that is why she's a-spinning a Never cloak to wear for then, to meet the cold. We've bearsuits; she does not; the Wendy bird will freeze, will freeze, and her Never house all slatty. And what has she in her spinning basket there? Oh, mermaids' hair, butterfly wings, locks of Hook's hair, pixie dust, dead pixies' wings, a myriad of sparkling things, a few stars here, a few Never leaves there; she's spinning them *right in*; I daresay she'll blend in and then what then? Will the Peter bird still *love her*? Because, as you know, he only loves them when they are quite *different*. But, Tootles, she will still have *that thing*. What thing? What thing? I hardly know what you mean by *that*

The Home Under Ground

Wendy, have you quite come to terms with what it means to *fly home*? I don't quite think so; you see, I've a certain crick in my neck from all of that spinning, and the applying of various poultices—Tiger Lily's pussy lard and Peter's toe jam—haven't quite been working, although Tiger Lily's father quite said they would. So, no, I haven't actually been thinking too much on what it means to *fly home*. Why don't you tell me.

thing. I complain of Wendy who has gone nights now without telling us a story. Wendy, she's in to her elbows in the wash basin trying to demusk the sheep fleece. It's a ram, you see, and it has a certain *aroma*; it's ever-so-much stronger than you might think.

The *business* trip will take eleven days; will you be quite lonesome without. Me? The doves all crying; why, yes, you've guessed it, Wendy! In the eaves. Don't be. So sad. Isn't this exactly the kind of life you imagined. For me? Oh, no. Oh, no. There will be no lovenotes sent to you in starcode; the boss simply won't allow. It. If you like, maybe you could leave. A note with the secretary. She'll be happy. To help. You. This, I know. For certain. She's always so eager. To please. But you mustn't. *Cry*, Wendy. That won't do; that won't do. At all. Oh, there! Will you look at. The time. It's about time, really. It's about time that. I got going. And what's that, you say? The cradle? We'll discuss it. Later. When I get back. Home. Isn't it a wonder? Really. That belly of yours is really. A wonder. Quite.

The look in his eyes: it is *delicious*. His eyes say that he'd like to shred Hook to pieces with his good sword, the sword that cut Hook's hand off, and not his hobby one. But sometimes

The Home Under Ground

Wendy, I daresay I think it's about time that we let these things *go* now. Wolf has stopped crying; little lost egg yolk has stopped crying; centipede and caterpillar have stopped crying; old Smee, he of the lost marbles, even he, Wendy, has stopped crying. Old kite all tattered and soiled now—even it has stopped crying. It's only you now who won't stop. Crying. Good god, old lady, you must stop crying. See, see that old moon: close one eye and then two fists over between those two stars there: there you will fly.

he'll mistake the good sword for the hobby sword: this can make a meeting with anything quite *dangerous*. For him, it isn't a matter of *unknowing* but rather a matter of *forgetting*. Peter is the boy of *forgetting*. (Wendy would like to *forget* that.) Well, aren't *you* clever; aren't you *just the part!* For he is *just the part*, you know. 'That's her! That's *my* Wendy, he'll say when he sees *just the right girl*. (The prop is only make-believe!) She *is* just the right girl. Oh, but won't the *real* old lady be quite jealous? Won't she just get all Tinker Bell on us? Start pricking and plotting some sort of death for the girl? Won't matter; won't matter: something will *save* her; something always *saves* her. That's how the story always ends. Nothing really happens when the Tinker Bell tries to kill anyone. Nor crocs; nor bearded men. Just the Peter bird, then? Just the Peter bird then.

Is it real, Peter, is it real that you have *left me*? I complain of Peter, who has *left me*. The

The Home Under Ground

Maybe everything's just falling apart now: skeleton leaves showing their seams. I know how this will go: you'll say that you don't really *love* me. Here: take something. To remember me. By. That's the way the story goes, right, Peter bird? And will you come for any *gifts*? I do fear that I've quite run dry of *stories*. You've heard them all before. Oh, yes, but you do forget. You'll forget this one too I guess. No amount of reminding will get you to think of this one in a year's time. Or maybe. Maybe if I can teach the Never birds to say my name. Maybe if I can get one of the Never boys to keep reminding—oh, but they die. They die, too. They die from the cuts and scrapes from wars with the braves with the wolves with the grizzlies with the pirates too, and you'll *replace*. Them. That, you'll do. As is your fashion. And you'll replace me, too. Replace; replace; replace. It's such a *funny* word: replace.

leaving was not so make-believe. I too, like Tink, will spend the rest of the whole of my life glorying in being. Abandoned. Tink says she *glories in being abandoned* (92).

Not so much as a sorry-to-lose-you between them! If she did not mind the parting, he was going to show her, was Peter, that neither did he. But of course he cared very much (97). Or so, that is the story that we tell ourselves, the story we *want* to believe. But doesn't caring *very much* mean *everything*? As in: I'd do *anything*? No, we hadn't thought so; we thought not. But oh, Wendy, is that there your manuscript all caught in the trees? Did the Peter bird get angry and wish it gone and it got all caught up in the branches there? There *will* be a story for you to leave, but your leaving will insist on it more than you. What's that you say? You have a little papoose? A little cocoon to hang, too? Mother wolf all dead now: will your little whelps be going, too? Will they need a nursery room? Shall we, Wendy? Shall we turn your house into a whelp rumpus room?

See, Wendy, he doesn't want to *have* the cake; he wants to *eat* it; that is what makes him just like every other little bird. If you save the cake, well, it gets old anyhow anyway, and no one

The Home Under Ground

The grown-ups again have *spoilt* everything. They too will take the Wendy girl away. Peter didn't leave the room, and that is why it happened this way. If only he didn't stay. But he did, and he told *his* story. And it was his story that made it so that the girl Wendy wished to go away. You see, it is *story* that takes them. The *dread* is what makes Wendy *forgetful* (97):

Peter, will you make the necessary arrangements? (97). It's quite like a funeral. This is what happens when Peter doesn't forget. And oh don't you wish he hadn't?

wants it then; no fighting over it then; cake doesn't get eaten so cake's all sad and lonesome now; that's what happens when a cake gets old; gets old. But didn't the little man say that I should look lovely, lovely at sixty-six and that we should hurry up to get there to see, to see if anything about me had *changed*? I daresay, I already need to stitch my shadow in a bit more tightly here and there. There's some red spilling out already. Already? Already: is that always to mean *too soon*? I complain of *already* who's making it happen. Too soon.

Old story: Tootles after his first days on the island: I'm so *sorry*, Peter: I haven't quite figured out just how it is that I might take a Never poo. Sometimes, you see, when I've been telling you that it's pretend time to go to the bathroom, I've had some BMs that were not quite make-believe and not knowing just how to go about disposing, I've been lugging them to the mermaids' lagoon. I said, look here, these are brownies that Peter made for you. At first, they seemed quite happy, but lately, they seem quite sick with vomiting, with something like the influenza, and that is the only reason why I come to you to ask how to properly dispose

The Home Under Ground

We could, you know, wait. We could wait to see if Maimie leaves a toy wolf out in the secret spot in the Gardens. Nibs: Maimie all dead now. No one else quite *replaced* to leave toys in the Gardens. That's why we steal real boys, real food, real hens, real goats, real eggs. Where have the bearsuits come from then? Why, we killed bears, Peter; you told us to do so. So much bloodshed, you know. Quite a few *adventures*, you know. Pirates *quite real*; planks *quite real*; sharks down there *quite real*; all this hovering in the in-between—that's *quite real* too I do believe, excepting perhaps for you, a Betwixt-and-Between. And what if the wolf wasn't a mother, wasn't a mother at all? What then? Fathers are ferocious, Peter—that you know.

of Never poo. He tells this story to Wendy; he's the one ordered by Peter to daily empty out Wendy's Never loo.

Tell me, Peter: why didn't we have a Never camera so that I might take home with me a negative of you? Something that I could always let the light shine through. An inverse image of you. And you're (sic) little baby teeth: *quite* bewitching! That is so attractive of you. And, why, today, how charming: you're all full of seaweed: even your teeth, as if you've been munching on the lip of the lagoon. A guppy all coiled in your ear; a sand crab in your belly hole. I do say: maybe there's a sea worm, somewhere, up you. Can you resist? Can you resist, Peter? They're lulling at the moon: you should be lulling, too, at the moon. And that's how you come to be. This way. Give yourself one more thing to blame *it* on.

Seasonal change: a bit more bitterness in the tart, in the dark, in the pineapple upside down; more crisp in the apple crisp, in the dusk, in the unlayering leaves. But there's more to it, to this story than the Peter bird will let on. For once now, for once now, the rain has let up. If there hadn't been a mother Wendy, why, they would have been out in it for days, days. And Peter would have lost some boys to the sickness of rain and would have been so lonely then. He would have buried them out in the grove of lilacs—down low where so many

The Home Under Ground

Are you quite sure that the window will be *left open*? How can you be so sure, Wendy? What if mother got so tired with the waiting that she went and found other birds? After all, she so did love to be. A mother. Maybe we shouldn't think so hard or anymore and just let what happens happens. We can *come back*, can't we, Peter?

blackberries grow. This is an *addition* that some mother or other made long ago. Is it that you retell a story to make it. *True?* I complain then of the storyteller who retells a story to make it true. The story to be retold is the story of how Peter and Wendy were marooned. That one didn't quite go as it should: mermaid girl all frolicking off in the waters there, and when he sees the big kite a-coming, Peter says to Wendy, go, go, go! Or maybe it shouldn't happen quite like that.

Remember always: that *look* in his eyes. That look is the look that means he cares not if his sword is real or make-believe: he only has it in mind *to kill*. That is what that look means. You'll see it surely if you haven't until now. It's the same look that means that he doesn't know you, at least not *right now*. He will fly on maybe without you. *I say, Wendy, always if you see me forgetting you, just keep on saying 'I'm Wendy,' and then I'll remember* (36). But will it work *always?* I say, Peter, always if you see me wanting you...what then? For now: peaches; for now:

Mother *moves away*, Peter, and all the little baby birds fly, too. It's nothing *personal*; it's just

The Home Under Ground

Mother wolf all dead now. Do you think we were just a bit too late to be with her during her dying? During her last days? Oh my! She was all confused, says whelp four. Whelp two died, too, and Peter not in time for that either. It was just the way it *happened*. So strange. So strange. He even rushed out of the clouds so that he might be there *in time*.

Poor mother wolf: perhaps it is better for her; she never did quite get over the death of wolf one: wolf one all a vague whistling the whole of the rest of her life.

that the husband just thinks that maybe perhaps you've had your last trouncing about. Why, you know, a *future* husband. We see him on the train platform; he's there to meet a woman of ever-so-uncertain age. You're so fond of writing about things that happen in the future; you should know what by this I mean. Island all a bit too pew-y now, too quiet now. No matter what, Peter, baby swans follow their mother; see: just like that constellation in the stars. Your soup: all a-brimming, swan flesh and stars, and it's all make-believe.

The rope marks will not *disappear*. Oh, happier days, when Peter was just a dream that 'came more and more. Real. I have hurt myself, she says, falling. That is the story she tells Peter to get Peter to forget about lovers. Are you so surprised, Wendy, that I should now come for you? Flowers are still, still in bloom, even this late, in bloom; how far, how long does it take for the heart to grow fond, fonder still? You see, I break things up *here* while you're still the girl Wendy to spare us, spare us. Is that copper? Has it turned all green and pretty? Why, yes, Wendy, it was new and shiny when you first gave it to me.

Yes, it is a dull beginning. I say, let us pretend that it is the end (93). But how should it be, the end? You see, Peter, I too, alone, without you, can have *adventures*. And that is why I now must

The Home Under Ground

Old fat cloud shunt up against the moon now. Lay on your back, Wendy; like this, and see now you can sleep. This layer of cloud: a little less *turbulent*. I don't quite think I like where it is that you are taking me. After all: there were *preparations* made. I don't think I like to go where there have been *preparations*. I haven't quite been *prepared* for the. Is it because your water gourd is breaking? Old umbilical vine twisting towards where we are going.

go. I can leave *you*. Imagine that! Bet you didn't quite think. Of that. And I will take all my stories, the children, and half the furniture, too. But I didn't quite want to leave, like that. I should like to spend some time with my pumpkins, with my roses, too. Will everything be just like this, just like this when I return to you? Please don't say that there should be another girl sleeping. In my bed. Why look, Peter. You can, without me, *entertain*. Why, look at your Neverland silver, your single-serving spoon.

Mummy and daddy will take us. I am sure they will take the whole lot of us. They've a house *full of nurseries*, and if it isn't enough, why, they'll move from 27 to a completely different house, a house far out in the country, so far that the old man of the stories cannot come out to visit us. That's the way maybe that it should be, maybe. Old Nana anyway

The Home Under Ground

Peter, Peter: you're quite the *grave digger*. The babes newly planted here by you, all mossed over by now with tombstones, too. And when I die, will you, will you dig a grave for me? Or will I be just too big, too ordinary? I should require a bit more digging, you know. The ground now so terribly shattering. Perhaps it is better to go out the way of the pirates: something certain and sinister anyway about their ship: all a dead black bird; the sails all a crushed bird wing. I should require a bit more *digging*. In the case of the love story here inserted: certainly a big more digging. I, too, shall be *a ghost*: I think; I know; I connote. The Never locust: all wedged into a bale of hay. And where has this wheat field come from? Suddenly, a wheat field just sprung, just sprung: a new life. Cross it, Wendy, and you shall see. See how the twilight catches the grains: so sparkly. Here: I'll walk with you, but only part of the way. But I want to go all the way with you, Peter: all the way.

wants to run, to run. She'll die soon anyway, and she, too, will be *replaced, replaced*. How is *that* for a *story*? Mummy and daddy will *take* us; I'm sure they will take the whole lot of us. Why, and if they haven't enough nurseries, we'll transform the parlor into one and move beds in there and everything. And to think! To think that when you've grown, you can have a job that you go to by railway. There's no railway in this here Never. And, well, quite simply: aren't you weary of going about with bare feet? How is *this* for an ending? I complain of Wendy, says Tootles; I complain of Wendy, who is always wanting to give us endings.

Perhaps we will save *that* for the very, very end. *That* should be reserved for the very end. A storyteller knows that. Knows that much, at least. Illuminate then the earthbound tree; Mr. Caw all taking attendance there. Are all the children accounted for, accounted for? Only one of us knows how to perch right, just so. Peter's talons can quite curl around the bark. Will you, Wendy, will you remain with me? Mr. Caw can make it so that you have special

The Home Under Ground

Poor old pussycat: you'll live out your life on the plank forever. Maybe ole Smee will throw you the remains of some fish or other. Poor old pussycat: you've been chased out of the pantry. Old geese, you won't chase them down, just yet, just yet; those there *can fly*; they're the *wild* kind, but not those; those have been *domesticated*. And, you, too, like the Peter bird, somewhat feral, a Betwixt-and-Between: that is why you aren't being pet, you know. No one wants to love forever a wild thing. We know just what happens when you get bored and weary: there will be a late night; there will be a *mystery*. That is why you have dreams of the jungle, dear pussy. Dear pussy, the big cats will come soon; they'll take on you.

claws, special wings. And don't you want wings, Wendy? I should think you would. Want wings. See: there's an *itching*; an itching.

See: it's ever so much more interesting with real-life encroaching. That's the small and the short of it. Oh, I see: I see: the Joke's on *me*: it is indeed Lock Out time: Lock Out time for the girl Wendy. Should she be barred now from the Neverland, and why? The hem not quite, not quite reaching, reaching? (Oh, that *old* story.) If only she had been the girl with the fur pelisse then. Then. Maybe there would have been a bit of her the Peter bird would have liked, stroking; maybe she would have been loved because she was *like* a nest. And don't you look exactly, I mean *exactly* like a nest? Mr. Caw so big: he takes up the whole of the tree; a black wing taking up the whole of the sky, the late-summer scene: maybe he's all just

The Home Under Ground

And have the nightmares started, started? Ole Hook by the curtains, parting, parting. No, that's Peter, not Hook: Peter who loves the parting, parting. At night, balled up and crying: oh, Peter, did you dream, did you dream of your mother? And was it a beautiful dream? Vengeance all lapped up in the clouds now; a sickle chamber come to greet me; was it true that mailboxes would be *this empty?*; no one warned of *that*; nightmares sometimes make me want to *go back, go back*; stars all sinister; nightlight all sinister; doggie nurse all *sinister*; peeing all sinister; (can't help but think—can't help but think that I am quite done with the peeing); underbelly of toads so sinister; Jolly Roger hull so sinister. Oh, dear Peter, you didn't tell me right away that you were a gravedigger. My goodness, my goodness, and your home *is* under ground. Have we quite reached the end yet? Or is there still that one story to tell? Tell it, Wendy; tell it.

shadow now, a big black mashed feather of a thing; I daresay it makes me miss a certain somebody. And will you, too, Mr., buy me a dog? Buy me a dog to make me less *lonely*? And then will you take the dog to gather, to gather. Your lost boys all a-trouncing after *my* dog. I suppose that's how they live in houses above ground. I daresay I'd rather be below.

To guide her strange craft (83): that is what the girl Wendy needs to do in order reach safety, if she. Wanted to, which she doesn't, you see. Ever so much more *adventurous* now on the island made real, made real. Hook: whatever transpired here between us should be kept between you and me, you and me. But the apples, the apples *were* delicious. Old sea cat: lured me, *lured* me. For you: I give a lock of Wendy hair. For you: I set off future distress flares: cometomecometomecometome. *I'm Wendy*. There was so much nice rocking in that Jolly brig there. Darling: avast.

The Home Under Ground

We are on something, Wendy, and it's growing *smaller* and *smaller*, that is *why*, Wendy. The island's made real, and so is the small thing that's growing smaller. Stand on the smallest part of it on tiptoe and still, the thing will happen, and that is why the mermaids are here to sing; they know when the small thing happens, when the moon needs singing to. Old turtle lived two hundred years, went belly up there, and the mermaids took to calling to the moon then, too. If you feel ever so many *shudders*, Wendy, I will only feel *just the one* (82). See: something is *engulfing*. It is growing smaller and smaller, Peter, because, I do believe it's because of me: the girl Wendy growing *bigger* and *bigger*: so big. So big that baby's kite I fear won't anymore save me. It is *engulfing*; it is.

Mermaids: all deserted *now*; hair all wrapped up in algae. They're only *playing* dead, the Peter bird says, because they think you've come to get 'em. Some little bird told 'em so—told 'em that you were out to get 'em. That is what love *can do*: it can make you go out and get 'em.

And have you already found another little girl to? Until, until. Should I speed up the birth and delivery in order to see you, see you?

Crocodile come now, and you have killed. My love. Where is it that I should go? Perhaps, perhaps I'll say that it's time, boys: it's about that time that we went to go see mother. (We'll see what look the Peter bird has in his eyes then.) Jars of preserves done gone empty:

Tootles been eating; face and hands all slimy. He's the one who always seems to be *in trouble*.

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To guide her strange craft (83): that is what the Never bird needs to do in order to save the Peter bird from drowning; all the lessons from the swans, the chickadees, the swallows, the whip-poor-wills too could not teach the Betwixt-and-Between to keep from drowning. (That is what we learned when we heard about the girl Maimie. Why, Peter, you never mentioned *her* before, says Wendy.) Should the rock symbolize whence hope springs? New lives already done sprung, done sprung; new lives, new lives always messing up everything: that Never boy and that Never boy and that Never boy all too big for their knickerbottoms and now what and what then? And shall we? Shall we try to *play* again? Oh, no! Oh, no! dear man: you see: we are seriously struggling to make an *ending* happen. Here. Ole twins are readying for school now: lunch pail all duly packed by mother now. Fine: go on then: walk along the platform and see: see how all of this for *you* will end.

What have we here, Peter? Have I not left you enough varieties of: maple, boysenberry, lingonberry, raspberry, blueberry, lemon, apple, cherry. Not enough? Not enough *variety* for you? But doesn't the coffee taste *good* this morning? Coffee: drink it; that's what grown-ups *do*. They do. You shan't have *this* jam; this jam's no longer *for you*. Love all killed now, and the children hated him, didn't they? They booed; they *frowned*. And I bet, I bet, all the little girls threw thimbles at you. Oh, Peter, you're turning every pocket, *every* pocket: inside out, inside out! (19) But I have the *acorn button* (23). The acorn button is something that, up until now, I've kept. Silent about.

Children have the strangest adventures without being troubled by them. For instance, they may remember to mention, a week after the event happened, that when they were in the wood they met their dead father and had a game with him (7). But maybe, Wendy, maybe you'd like to *see me* one last time, one last time. But I shouldn't like to cause any *trouble* for you or your husband or your brood. If you think it would, that is, cause *trouble*, well then, well then. (Such a long fortnight in Paris with you!) And he's such a *good* husband, too: see how much he *loves*, how much he *dotes* on you. He keeps the stove all lit and warm *for you*. He puts a baby in the cradle *for you*. He signs the

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Wendy began to be scrawled all over with him (6). As you will; as you will: read this *as you will*.

Whether the he is the little Betwixt-and-Between or whether the Betwixt-and-Between is he: there is a male hand, and it is *scrawling* on a little girl. All over, that is. At what point is the girl no longer herself but a mere *scrawling*? Scrawling, Wendy, I daresay, in this light, in this light, I could scrawl you all day. Have we really passed the day in scrawling? Yes, Peter: we have scrawled, and that is why I have an acorn button from you, from you.

greeting cards together *with you*. That's a good husband, Wendy, an ever-so-good one that is he. I have a new nest here; I've put it together *so nicely*; I would like to show you, but not if you think it would cause. Trouble. But shouldn't there be, at a last meeting, *something said*? Should I say a little something sweet and true *for you, Wendy, for you*? I missed the marrying, didn't want to be a man for you; that I would never do; not even *for you, Wendy*, and how ever-so-much I loved you. I loved. You. You of the acorn caps; you of the precious peas. And see: my clothes still need pressing; no one does it quite like you, quite loved me like you. Teeth all yellowed now; gum line all receding; hair all thinning now; and no children to remind me. I suppose I was always so old and diseased and yet still, Wendy, you *loved me*. You loved me with the holes in my socks, holes in my knees. I fly over your house, Wendy, over and over and I think to see you, but I never do see. You. Would you like to see my new little nest? I shouldn't like to cause any *trouble* for you and Mr. But, Peter, if I decline such a request, wouldn't it show, wouldn't it show that I had a little something *withheld*? That there was a reason why, still, I should not see you? And what has any of this to do with the *opening*? Why, because you see, I had seen you, I had been seeing you: in

The Home Under Ground

The Peter is so terribly upset: no one will stop calling him. Pan. That's not who he is, you know. Why look: he works in an office and wears a tie too and on occasion, why, yes, he has had a beard even. Do you think it's because some girl somewhere left the toy train out in the night for the Peter and it entered the Never world? That may have been one story. About how it *happened*. It *happened*; that's for sure. The Mrs. quite upset. The sky all a loam of engine smoke. Which grave marker had he? PP. The headlines will read. They will read, and that's how we will know that the PP has.

dreams, in flashes, in the in-between.

But in her dream he had rent the film that obscures the Neverland (9). And that is what made the girl Wendy *different* from the other girl children; Wendy had been *courted* by the Peter bird. In *her* dream he had rent the film, and that is how they should have known that Peter was coming for them. She thinks: this is why I am ever so better than Maimie: *he* came for *me*: I just didn't lose myself there; this must mean that maybe perhaps he loves me. Quite, ever so much more than Maimie. And besides, what kind of name anyhow is Maimie? Better to have a name that came from not being able to say it properly. I'm Wendy.

Tinker Bell: she's mending all the *pots and kettles* (25). Pots and kettles, wouldn't you know it, need *a lot*, quite a lot of mending. Why, isn't it a task just a bit too big for a fairy? How many kettles have you, have you anyhow in the Neverland? I daresay, whatever for do you need so many kettles? Tinker Bell: she's *hardly* dressed you know. That seems to be the way it is with the Never womenfolk: there's hardly a leaf there to shelter the little tuft of pubis-a-wisp. (It's shimmering white down there!) Tinker Bell: she has such a big nether eye, as if, as if she's been digging for something. (I'm not sure if we're *allowed* to say it. But isn't this

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Perhaps there should always be *more*. Love involved. That is what makes for a good story. Wendy, I do say that I will love you more. I just need more. Time. Cloud there in the distance all like a brig gone awry. You and I: the last survivors. For sure; for sure. Some wreck occurred here, here, here at your heart. Something in there all a mess now, I know. Surely if I play at being Never doctor. Surely.

adventure getting quite long, quite long now?) Tinker Bell: how go you?; how go you when the season is done? Old cicada shells all gleaming out at sea. There's a little boat for you, for you. Tinker Bell: the Never catfish would like to eat you. Do you feel rather lonely out there by yourself? I should think you would feel *rather* lonely out there. By yourself. Is it true that Peter forgot to teach you too how to stop? (I complain of Peter who didn't bother to teach us *how to stop*.) Tinker Bell: is there really a pot of gold somewhere, somewhere? I should think not. The Hook bird would like to eat you. The Smee bird, too; you see, you've the loveliest and littlest of pillows, the tiny tiny pin-prick of a pocket. And that is why, for sure, that all of the Never birds would like *to eat you*. Tinker Bell: there ought to be another scenario here *for you*. Tomorrow, we shall write it: we shall write it *true*.

There was ever such a *tiny* room for you. Little golden straws you placed all in an acorn cap, little Peter fingernail clippings glittering like half-moons. And has anyone, anyone bothered to feed you baby crabs? Why, they'd be just the right size for you! I do say, Tinker, that is terribly *cute*. But what have we here? What is this? Have you, Tink, have you gotten stuck with the shorter stick? The shorter end *of it*? We know you meant to kill, to kill. Peter's

The Home Under Ground

Let us make a telegram tree, and we'll see in the morning which one of us has gotten a message. Will that do? Will that do *for you*? Who among us overnight will play at being the telegraph master? Who among us will play at being the one to hang the telegrams from trees? I say, should we go to the house? Should we go a-knocking? But that is how the grown-ups do it; we will have to do it differently from them. We'll write on the back of the skeleton leaves. Oh, dead fairy all huddled up in this one here.

pubes all strung up with crustaceans and barnacles: what must be hiding deep within the lagoon, gathering itself in some fishy fallopian tube? Why, it does have fins and gills; it does look incredibly *fishlike*: what phylum is it, is it? But now, Tink, let us return to you, to you. Have you tired of the mending? I do say this hole here looks purposefully placed. Such a little hole too; do you think the Peter bird will break through, break through? (He should be in a birdcage, not you; not you.) That is all you want, isn't it, a dear lady like you, is to have the Peter bird break through? Why, it looks as if you're limping just a bit, just a bit. Perhaps you'll need a bandage and crutches, too; where ever will we get such small medical supplies

The Home Under Ground

Little Tink: your light is quite *out*. You might have begun so *small*, so *suddenly*. Why, that lantern carried through the air: that's how you began. (Michael tells it so, and with him being baby, we let him make up the story sometimes, too. Also, it isn't quite so fair is it? It isn't quite so fair how Peter oftentimes, always gets authorship. Perhaps it's because little man loved the other boy so and didn't want to let on. Too much.) Little Tink: did you love for exactly eleven months and a day? I see, I see the little fairy baby you're carrying: crawled outside of you as a little lump of gold. Smee found it in a little cavern, filled a cavity with it: with your little baby. She's all singing in his tooth now. Tink: I knew how badly you wanted to be. With Peter. And how he locked you up on account. Of me. These things: can we say *sorry* for? I know only now that I, like you, felt the certain ache and search for something to fill, to fill: that's why you stole the peas; that's why you slept in a pod. I can only forgive you this now. I can tell you that on the day of your funeral, why, Peter looked all glazed over; maybe he had the *shakes*? He kept wanting to do *something else*. Why, I think I should like to be a farmer, says he, right when we were sending you out to sea.

for you? The Tinker dental dam; the Tinker tampon. Old little tin cup you drank from: look! They've taken to using it as. And your little stillbirth, all like a tadpole, all a-gasping in your little kettle of water.

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This much is ever so real; this much isn't make-believe: *Peter Pan can do a great deal in ten minutes* (29). He can do a great deal *to you*. For example, he can put a little something inside of you, and you will carry that for the rest of your life; thimble all empty underneath in the inside. The molar pregnancy: lasting, lasting; placenta all set to bursting, all full of nothing, nothing. I like the way they scurry about, the land crabs, says she. We haven't any land crabs back home. Maybe I can pluck one from the Never shore and take it, take it? Home. How long, Peter, might it take? To go all the way? With you? Is the film rent? Is the sky rent? How much longer do I have? Until? You no longer adore? Me? It never takes ten minutes to get anywhere, anywhere. And should I change my mind up on that cloud there? How would that work? Would I be able to return then, to return then to the Never nest? I should very much want to stay the whole of the rest of my life in our little Never love nest. But I do have the worms, and I do need for mother to take me to a proper doctor— everything all so much worse when you play at being. It. (Or when Jas Hook plays at being *it*.) So embarrassed now of my Never loo: worms all a-waving, all a-wriggling like Never anemones. This ending isn't quite so *elegant*; this ending will never do, never do; please tell the lady: please tell the lady to redo, *redo*. I should be in a horse and carriage; I should be carrying a bouquet for you. And I will carry a bouquet *for you*.

Also he was fond of variety, and the sport that engrossed him one moment would suddenly cease to engage him, so there was always the possibility that the next time you fell he would let you go (34). You see, you have to do it *today*. If you *do it* today, then you'll have something *tomorrow* that you didn't have *yesterday*. That is the way the darkness works: something unknown grows a little bigger each day. How *did* he know just what to do with the goat? He read the notes from the first one who explained to him how human children play. Fear will fall upon, anon, anon. That is why the goat was used ultimately to take the dead children away. Maimie first, then John, then Jack, then Dorothy, then mummy, then Wendy too, then Jane, then Margaret, then you, too. *Ever so much more than twenty (152)*. Even you.

Parting at last with mutual expressions of good-will (33). Only it wasn't quite like that. There was

The Home Under Ground

There was quite a *pull* here: little kite strings. And to think, to think: all that time that I was in bed sleeping, I could have been here with you talking, as you say, to stars (27). All that time. There was quite a kick here, in the hull: a little baby foot I do believe. It swims about as if, as if part mermaid. Some days: so anxious: can't quite sleep. Little nightlight: doesn't quite keep the dark out of the in-between. A brig's sail all billowing out from the curtain just now. In the morning, apples will litter the ground, and it won't be because you shook them there: something else in the air severing. Someone's come and plucked off all of the gourd blossoms; just left them there to wither. Now there shan't be any pumpkin. Pumpkin: baby all curled up in you, too. And, Peter, you daresay that *you* are the *sole survivor*? I complain of Peter who claims to be the sole survivor. There indeed *were* survivors of the wrecked brig, and I, the Wendy girl, was just *one* of them.

ever-so-much of something else involved: a *briefcase* that refused to be used as a *briefcase*. And what else can be found *in there?*: a calendar and ledger, papers and toothpaste. Why have you, have you got a trip *overnight?* Will good wifey be waiting, be waiting at home? I daresay that the moon isn't quite right, isn't quite romantic tonight, all tumbleweedish, all compacted loam. Tumbleweeds, all a-blowing on the Neverland vistas. Oh, go, go and play your cowboy, go and play your torturing, go and play that you're bringing Tiger Lily home. And did you quite refuse to wear your tie to eat here at the head seat? I've made herring and the dishes here are bone. I do think you would very much like to own. A home. See: the train will take you to where you need to go. No more flying. No more flying far away from home. Nary a brig, nary a whalehull, just a corset, just a corset for you. It's ghastly. It's

The Home Under Ground

The night now: all a-brimming. Something frothy about the stars. Ole cold old man living somewhere here I know. That's how we'll come to understand. We'll come to understand the stars. And have you drawn your straw? Strawing place: lines so long, so long. And have you drawn your scrawl? Scrawling place: lines so long, so long. The kite has been sent here, see?: the kite has been sent here because I daresay, Wendy, the water is reaching well past your knees. This will make it so that there is *another day* for you. (The clapping will not someday right you: that is only a trick of the fairies. So *sorry* for you.) *I am old, Peter. I am ever so much more than twenty* (152). So don't you get up; don't you turn up the light; don't you come near. Me. *He sat down on the floor and sobbed* (152). That is what Betwixt-and-Betweens do. Who is the more heartbroken now you tell me. (But it was new, Wendy, when you gave it me.) Sea foam: something like the verdigris all in it.

ghastly all right. Only someone about yeahigh will do, will do.

This is how things *ended*, you see: ever so much more differently than the endings in Wendy's stories. And have they all gone and grown up and gotten married? I daresay they've all gotten married, and there's no tincture that'll cure *that*. Never bird: she's so *done* with all that popping out of babies. I complain of the Never bird, of middle-aged ladies who are done

The Home Under Ground

And, Peter, will you put things in *little* boxes, *quite little* boxes? Every fairy ever loved all shelved now in cigar boxes, the *petite* ones in sardine tins. Old pirates throwing these things for you *out*. Have you then a little seashell or perhaps some buttercups to decorate? To *decorate* her hair? And have you a *memento*? For you know we girls just love mementoes, would love very much to have a time with the very best one. That is some sort of story, don't you know. A box inside a box inside a box: that is how the best burials go. Mrs. Darling's mouth: a burial sideshow, all the dead ones lined up in a neat row all down and down her throat: she's all squirrely with the dead girls. Maimie, especially, all locked up in there, too. Have you a certain element of shame, of *I do*? No, I didn't think so; I didn't think you do. Every little cocoon, each little cicada casing all blistered now; little critters done moved, done moved. Hitch your dress a little higher. That I don't need to do. Anymore; anymore; old tide knows how I've now a little grown. Old melon flowers; old hothouse flowers; old trellis flowers; I think I should like roses *best* of all. And perhaps a little jar of peas, please. And didn't you know that these sands are numbered, numbered? They number you best of all.

with the popping out of babies. We need more babies; more babies means more fairies; means more Peter treats.

Next morning: it may not have been your *little feet*, says Wendy, but I have seen—I have seen the imprint of your little teeth all about the dawn; there's a certain slant of bicuspid that can only be yours, Peter, yours alone. See there, in that little fracture of sky there? And the sign of incisors all gorging upon and gouging the sky as if some animal wanted to be *let*. Out. Oh, and was it *delicious*? To feast upon the sky? Oh, oh, and now the stars, too; shall a certain star, too, be my nemesis? And I should know now why it's been two weeks since you have wanted to claw. Upon me. You have found. Your clawing elsewhere. My dear, my dear pet wolf: I will tell you the difference between A and Z.

The Home Under Ground

And where have you come from, come from? If indeed you were *made before*, then when and where was it quite? I know a place where there are little snails. Out in the sunflower field, in little furrows there. New ones, it seems, each day, each day there appear. Each day, each day I cut a bit of sunflower and take it. Home. Will Peter today notice these? Out of what is something grown? A hole here, a hole there. I know a place where there are little souls; out in the sunflower field, in little furrows there; new ones, it seems, each day, each day there appear. An emptiness where a sand crab makes home; a cavern where the Never squid calls home; a vase where the flowers wilt; a dark place where new lives done grown. *Done grown!* A hole here, a hole there, and the Wendy girl is called to mend, to mend. What is a pocket but a hole? A home. For the housewife who has grown, has grown, the home is nothing but a hole. The moon tonight so full, so full of cradles outgrown.

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