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Landscapes In-Between: Neverland and Its Windows

ABSTRACT
The portal is an essential element in the construction of space, being perceived not only as a frontier, but also as an opening point. Fantasy fictions use portals of diverse natures to link primary to secondary worlds. Exploring this aspect can offer a clearer picture of the consequences and influence that open or closed borders, as well as other structures of real space may have on the individual. The main hypothesis of my essay is that space in J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan and Wendy* comprises a network of portals that take on a cognitively magical role in the character's evolution. This network is built on fractals, starting with the window that mediates the passage between the material world and that of dream/ imagination, and reaching Neverland, which is not simply a secondary world, but actually a space-portal.

KEYWORDS
J. M. Barrie; Peter Pan; Neverland; Portal; Windows; Landscapes In-Between.

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In the last decade, research on the concept of portals (which may also be referred to as doorways, thresholds or gateways) has increased and varied its theoretical methods, despite not having exhausted all the meanings portals can incorporate or project onto the world. Because of such a thematic recurrence, portals are analysed especially in fantasy and science fiction literature, where alternative/secondary worlds are built, being different from or opposed to the primary worlds and accessed through magical or technological passages. Such different approaches entail that portals are not mere intermediary spaces between worlds (like the rabbit hole in Lewis Carroll's story or the wardrobe in *The Chronicles of Narnia*), but they are also assimilated by those characters and magical objects, which have the function of catalyzing the protagonists' ontological transformation during their journeys of initiation in the fantasy world.[1] Hence, the portal either designates a space, a non-space, a character or an object, but its main and rather obvious function is that of an initiation agent. It remains to be seen how this initiation takes place and what symbolical background it unfolds against.

The first attempts to find magical or philosophical interpretations for esoteric and material structures that connect spaces of different nature and, most often, allow access to another, higher level of existence go back to the beginning of the twentieth

century. The first consistent study on this subject belongs to Arnold van Gennep, who in *The Rites of Passage*[2] (1908), investigates the magical-religious dimensions of material/ symbolical crossovers (passages) to other worlds, as they are to be found in the case of semi-civilized populations. I will later return in my essay to Van Gennep's book, as his findings contain ideas that can be useful in the interpretation of fantasy literature.

How can we explain the human fascination and, partially, the researchers' preoccupation with space (real or imagined) and especially with spaces that are passages binding imagined landscapes and emplacements of the real world? In his essay on heterotopias,[3] Michel Foucault hints at a potential answer, suggesting that given its gradual desacralization time became an alienating barometer for individuals and society.[4] Therefore, space can keep a sacred form and a magical wrapping. This is the starting point that Foucault uses for his definition of the concept of heteroropia, describing it as the other space, mirrored in the actual world and accessed through specific rituals (some of the heterotopian principles find their counterpart in the rites of passage discussed by Van Gennep). On the other hand, Foucault's famous essay allows a deeper understanding of the portal: it is contained by the heterotopia, which can be either an autonomous space or, in other words, a third space, real and imagined (for instance, the theatre), but also a passage with the purpose of purifying and initiation, a portal towards other worlds or states of existence (for example, the cemetery or hospital).

Exploring and searching the psychological-imaginary grounding of space (if not sacred, at least alternative and evading) is a fervent task for any individual, as we, for instance, isolate ourselves in intimate spaces, which reflect our inner world. Furthermore, through the magical spell that is cast upon viewers by big screen motion pictures that build fantasy worlds, the stage is set for the human imagination and its power to overcome everyday life. Even in economically well-developed societies, space is a focal point consisting of images that construct identities, like grand buildings or the exploration of the universe. Through such a focal point that irradiates space images, individuals can define their identity and trace their becoming, as society tends to display and consolidate its cultural identity. Such mechanisms coagulate general ideas about the world we live in. Moreover, the way in which spaces in the actual world interact, contaminate each other or take on individual traits can offer answers as to how we function in relationship with our self and the Other.

A portal is an essential element in the construction of space, as it is perceived not only as a frontier, but also as an opening point. Fantasy fictions use portals of diverse natures to link primary to secondary worlds. Exploring this aspect can offer a clearer picture of the consequences and influence that open or closed borders, as well as structures of the real space have on the individual.

The Window: Portal and Liminality

What role does the window take on, especially the one through which Peter Pan guides the Darling brothers towards Neverland? Can we speak about Neverland as a secondary world, as it is the case for Wonderland and Narnia, or should we rather say Peter Pan's homeland is a portal towards something else? A new perspective on the well-known story of J. M. Barrie, about the boy who chose to live an eternal childhood, delivers a general image of the morphology of space in fantasy literature. I tackled this issue in my essay "On the Nature of Portals in Fantasy Literature,"[5] where I proved that a portal is the matrix for the production of objects, beings and imaginary situations in

fantasy literature, starting from the wardrobe through which Lucy enters Narnia.

The window, as a pivotal structure in the construction of space and narration, has only been partially studied by literary critics. The most relevant and thorough investigation belongs to Hilary P. Dannenberg, who in her study "Windows, Doorways and Portals in Narrative Fiction and Media"[6] (later in her book *Coincidence and Counterfactuality: Plotting Time and Space in Narrative Fiction*),[7] traces the main features of the window as a portal. Being, at the same time, not only an object but also a space in itself, a window connects separate landscapes when the human eye catches a glimpse of the world beyond the window's frame. It is important to mention that the window's functions can be represented and explained not only through the nature of the spaces it connects as a portal, but also through the space in-between[8] that the window actually contains.

A relevant excerpt of Dannenberg's theory states the following: "Windows and doorways thus facilitate our experience of three-dimensionality, and of the wholeness and connectedness of different spaces: the window or portal schema plays a cognitively magical role in the human body's perception, negotiation and connection of spaces."[9] My focus is the cognitively magical role that the portal fulfils, mentioned above, suggested by the way in which the psyche and the human body react when other spaces are accessed. The fact that the window and the portal, in general, link spaces of a different nature is only a scratch on the surface of the issue at hand. On a deeper level, we have to point out the consequences such a connectedness of spaces has on the characters entering, through a portal, into another world. Moreover, does the in-between state of the portal reflect on the characters and their identities and upon the perception of the self and of others? For a better understanding of the relevance of portals (talking either about windows or doors), we should imagine their total absence from our life, a game Dannenberg invites us to play. If doors and windows were to instantly disappear, one immediate consequence would be the appearance of a spatial void mirrored in our individual perception, emptying our body of significance and enabling a claustrophobic comprehension of our own body. Portals are, thus, merger points for spaces that vary in nature or could even be divergent and, moreover, such junctions could very well be considered mirrors for a unified self. Fantasy renders the portal a more incisive ritual function than those encountered in our everyday life, especially through magic and the imagination. During this initiation journey, where all social conflicts encountered in the author's world are staged, characters reach a form of identity wholeness once they return to the world left behind by entering the portal. Hence, the portal separates and breaks apart spaces that are unified through perception. Doors, windows and other gateways imply a ritual crossing of spaces, by creating and, at the same time, cancelling differences among them. Therefore, such a spatial crossing also reflects a ritual of the self, in which identity can be rebuilt by connecting to other spaces that actually compose Otherness.

On the other hand, the link between the portal and human interiority, which by crossing space and frontiers transforms in a positive manner, can be seen as "the organic connection between physical thresholds of the house and the animated liminal functions of thought and imagination that come alive at these apertures, the chiaroscuro at play at these boundaries that can open out or close in."[10] This chiaroscuro becomes relevant as it is marked by the relationship between portals and the liminal functions of thought and imagination. Moreover, the

chiaroscuro can display an intertwining of all that is known and unknown, coupled with the explosion of the irrational, born at the frontiers that mediate the human experience of space. Emerging on limits (spatial and psychological ones), the chiaroscuro points out the cognitively magical role Dannenberg identifies in the portal. In this case, the window is "the stable medium of transition,"[11] this being its main but also oxymoronic feature. The window as a stable portal, a fixed but infinitely replicated image, includes a transition process towards the unknown. This is a metaphor for the way in which thought and, especially, the imagination cuts across other spaces. Furthermore, the analogy between spatial closings/ openings and the liminal structures of the human psyche, showcases the in-between state of the portal that reverberates in the characters living in between worlds (hypnagogia). If inside the portal we encounter juxtaposing spaces and symbolical disjunctions that can be overcome, then the character's in-between state accumulates internal contradictions that can be gradually annihilated through the journey of initiation into the space opened by the portal. But what happens when some characters simply choose to live in between worlds? This is the case of Peter Pan and his status is represented by the function of the window through which the Darling brothers get to Neverland.

Crossworld Journeys

My main hypothesis is that space in J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan and Wendy*[12] comprises a network of portals that take on a cognitively magical role in the character's evolution. This network is built on fractals,[13] starting with the window that mediates between the material world and that of dream / the imagination, and reaching Neverland, which is not simply a secondary world, but a space-portal. This innovative idea states that Neverland can be seen as a portal, a landscape in between worlds. The arguments that support my intuition are numerous. My main starting point is Allison B. Kavey's study *The History and Epistemology of Peter Pan*,[14] but also Lori M. Campbell's *Portals of Power*.[15] Despite charting new territories, the two researchers focus rather on the symbolical elements of Peter Pan's story and reveal the relationship between imagination, thought (knowledge) and the growing up of the characters. Through this lens, Barrie's novel is seen as a perimeter where the strong ontological processes that occur place our protagonists, Peter Pan and the Darling brothers, at the heart of events. Despite being materially visible, the space is paradoxically abstract, but it can offer keys for shedding new light on this particular novel without altering, in any sense, Kavey's and Campbell's arguments.[16]

Allison B. Kavey identifies a set of contrastive, dual but transferring elements in the imaginary of *Peter Pan and Wendy* and I will group these sets into three categories.[17] Firstly, we are dealing with the contrast between the imagination, attached to the child's condition, and adulthood, which implies pragmatism, experience and empirical knowledge. Hence, the everyday

life of the adults is opposed to the fairy world of Neverland. At the core of such an opposition we will find the eternal conflict between the imagination/belief and reason/knowledge/facts. From this point of view, the children's mental landscapes (embodied by the emergence of individual Neverlands) come into conflict with the linear system of knowledge in the adult world. While the meta-Neverland, in Kavey's words, is multidimensional due to the combination of all the individual Neverlands, the material world of the adult is rather unidirectional as a natural consequence of using rationality instead of the imagination. The island (Neverland) depicts a void between the material world and the imagined geographies of the children. These two types of worlds (material and imagined) communicate with each other through the belief in Neverland, as this belief generates the secondary world. When children stop believing in fairies and in the imaginary realm, Neverland becomes a "blank landscape."[18] Lucian Boia explains how, in cultural history, the island takes on, in the imaginary, a better shape than in its actual real forms.[19] Hence, this type of belief in the secondary world, catalyzed by the imagination, also linked to the Secondary Belief J. R. R. Tolkien describes in "On Fairy-Stories,"[20] shows that the reader (and characters) strongly believe in the truth of the world imagined by the Sub-creator.

Secondly, the opposition between the material world of adults and Neverland is enhanced by Peter Pan's dual nature. Like the god Pan, who was half human and half goat, Peter Pan is half child and half bird, or to put it in Kavey's words, never human and never bird. Peter Pan is ageless and has no memory of his past, as he has lived an eternity in Neverland. Peter Pan never grows up and he never dies, as he is caught between realms of two very distinct natures. We shall see how the window, in the case of Peter Pan, and the shadow reconfigure these oppositions and dualities throughout Barrie's novel. Until then, I will return to Kavey's study and her analysis on the myth of changelings, on the transfer between the material world and the imagined one, but also on the characters that arrive in Neverland.

Peter Pan's character was surely inspired by the myth of changelings that tells stories on how newborns where taken and replaced by fairies. Peter Pan also kidnaps the Darling brothers, but without replacing them. According to Kavey, the children that enter Neverland are either sick or incompatible with the primary world they live in. Sickness can thus facilitate frequent routes towards Neverland, as this realm turns out to be a crossing point for ill children, a gateway between the material world and the place they will inhabit after death. Any child can imagine his or her own Neverland, but growing up will separate the children from the imagined lands, bringing them closer to the material world. Only ill children are more attached to Neverland, as their sickness keeps and suspends them in Peter Pan's homeland. Therefore, between the material and the imagined world we encounter a continuous transfer that has two different outcomes: the children either grow up, or cross into another state of existence. When maturing, Peter Pan destroys the children's imaginary self and, thus, they will end up in the material world. But, Neverland remains vivid in the children's minds and comes to life while awaiting slumber. By contrast, Peter Pan lives out his eternity in between worlds, as he is unable to choose only one form of existence. Furthermore, it is through him that the transfer between the material and the imagined world takes place, but not even Kavey hints at the fact that the object, the space or non-space (however we want to call it) that defines this transfer is actually the window in the nursery.

The Rites of Windows

Peter Pan enters the Darling brother's room through a window and after he teaches them to fly, they are guided, through the window, towards Neverland. Due to the window, Peter Pan loses his shadow and Mrs. Darling looks into her children's minds as she were looking through a window. Such a recurrence touches upon the importance of the window as a portal and the function it fulfils in the construction of fictional space.

Firstly, the window in the novel *Peter Pan and Wendy* has a dual nature. On the one hand, the window connects the material world of the adults to the children's imagined realm (Neverland). On the other hand, it stands out as a space in-between reflected symbolically in Peter Pan's identity. The window is a liminal structure that flags the conflict between imagination and empirical knowledge, being also an opening point towards the children's mental landscapes. "All the materials set into a window frame – whether horn, mica, or glass – seal the passage between outer and inner, inner and outer,"[21] as Gillian Beer states, suggesting that the window is a medium for permanent transition. But, in the case of Barrie's novel, the passage from the inside towards the outside and backwards has a double meaning. This transitory movement connects the material world to the imagined one and facilitates the constant exchange between the two, as the myth of the changelings shows and, especially, through Peter Pan's (as a miraculous being) meddling in the nursery. Hence, the window becomes the frame for the unveiling of meta-Neverland, a combination of all individual Neverlands that can be, afterwards, accessed also through the portal. Hypnagogia, "the intermediate mental state between sleeping and waking in which 'an awareness of imagination as experience of and on the threshold is enabled',"[22] ensures and facilitates the imaginary emergence of Neverland. In this sense, "windows can figure the access to dream states,"[23] through which the material world and the imagined one intertwine on a mental level. The crossing from the inside to the outside, thus, involves the connection between two very different spaces, but will also have repercussions on the characters' identities upon arriving in Neverland. From this angle, the window is not only a spatial limit, but also an inner one that takes on a cognitively magical role in the reconstruction of the character's self. Therefore, the scene in which the Darling brothers meet Peter Pan and are taken to Neverland is poignant. According to Van Gennep, the rites of passage are divided into preliminary rites (of separation), liminal rites (threshold) and postliminal (of aggregation).[24] Being a threshold, the window has a magical and ritual function, mirrored in the character's rite of self. Before crossing the window, the Darling brothers learn to fly. Hence, this represents a preliminary rite, a separation from the material world, aiming at transforming the character's identity. Being half child and half bird, Peter Pan manages, through this preliminary rite, to offer the Darlings a hybrid nature (of man and bird) in order for them to access Neverland. The ritual passage through space is, therefore, a ritual metamorphosis of identity that implies a detachment from the material world and the reach of a higher (magical) level of existence. As the Darling brothers keep their human nature, they will live in Neverland caught in between worlds, but once they mature they will return to the world left behind in the first place.

I would like to point out that there is an organic connection between the space's frontiers and the liminal functions of thought and imagination. This link showcases as a

core element the chiaroscuro risen from such liminal points that close and open. Furthermore, when the Darlings pass through the window, they experience this chiaroscuro, hypnagogic state between sleep and wakefulness and even a dream state, which activates the irrational nature of the individual. That is why the window, as a spatial frontier, turns out to be a portal towards the unconscious, as it was the case for the romantic double to offer a path for accessing the characters' abyss. Neverland is the landscape of the imagination, but also an area of the unconscious in the case of the Darling brothers, as they embark on the journey and play out all of Peter Pan's scripts.[25] Such a psychological chiaroscuro takes place on the boundaries of space, when, for instance, Lucy enters the wardrobe to discover Narnia or when Alice descends, through the rabbit hole, into Wonderland.

So far I have tackled the window as a border that ties the material world to Neverland, a space accessed when specific rites are performed, reflecting itself into the character's inner world. What can we say about the window as a space in-between, when it ceases to be simply a portal or a threshold to Neverland? I believe that the space in-between the window indicates Peter Pan's condition, as he lives an eternity in between two very different worlds. From this point of view, the moment in which nanny Nana tears up Peter Pan's shadow while closing the window can offer new clues for solving the main character's inner rupture.

Landscapes In-Between

The loss of the shadow is a Romantic theme, beautifully staged by Adelbert von Chamisso in *Peter Schlemihl's Miraculous Story*.[26] Corin Braga finds significant arguments that describe Peter Schlemihl's state after selling his shadow to the Devil. From a neo-Platonic perspective, the shadow represents the *psyche*, the nucleus of feelings, and once deprived of it, Peter Schlemihl lives trapped inside his body (instincts) and through his intellect. Still, in Christian thought, the shadow coincides with the soul and the Devil's grasp and its capture will damn the protagonist.[27] By comparing Barrie's and Chamisso's stories, Peter Pan's (even the name seems to imply a parallel) shadow represents his soul, his human nature, as he is half man and half bird. His hybrid state enables him to live in between worlds, to cross over into the material world and back to Neverland. By losing his shadow, when nanny Nana closes the window, Peter Pan is left with his bird traits, trapped in Neverland, and he could even destroy the imagined realm, as a reconnection to the material world would not be possible anymore. Neverland would cease to exist without the children that temporarily inhabit this landscape, since their imagination and belief create this space.[28] That is why Peter Pan attempts to regain his shadow and, therefore, his double nature, his existence in between two worlds that allow him never to grow up, or never to die, but especially to keep Neverland alive in children's imagination. "The window may affirm connection but equally it may assert exclusion,"[29] and for Peter Pan the window, as a space in itself, becomes a passage to the material world, but also a point of exclusion, when closed. The space in between the window actually provides the open and closed frontier between the material world and

Neverland, as Peter Pan continues to exist inside these borders. In any case, for of the Darling brothers and the other children that step into Neverland, these limits represent an inner portal.[30]

Allison B. Kavey concludes with the following:

> From the god Pan to fairy tradition in Britain and the epistemological divide between imagination and knowledge, Barrie's Peter Pan stories produce a complex landscape in which children play. Peter himself is a composite of bodies and characteristics borrowed from Pan, birds, fairies, and children that cannot fit into a single world but fits perfectly into neither the world of the living or the dead, the material or the natural, the real or the imagined, the human or the nonhuman (preternatural or animal). Because he cannot fit into existing categories, he straddles the worlds from which those categories derive their meanings, pressing hardest on the divide between the real and the imagined to create a space that can intrude into both places, the Neverland.[31]

The divided nature of Peter Pan turns Neverland into a landscape in-between. This is a space of transition to either maturation or death, as it is the case for ill children. Moreover, "[t]he name 'Never-land' itself connotes a negative or 'nothing' space from which one is unlikely to return."[32] Only the children's imagination, as Kavey explains, can fill out this space of nothingness, due to Peter Pan's permanent crossovers from the material world back into Neverland. As I previously stated, the universe in Barrie's novel is built on a network of portals that function as fractals. One of the first portals is the window that, through rites of passage, enables access for the Darling brothers to Neverland. But the window is also a space in-between, a place of opening and closing, of inclusion and exclusion that perfectly portrays Peter Pan's hybrid nature. Neverland is one of the few secondary worlds that works as a portal. Lori M. Campbell thinks of Neverland as a portal-place created by Wendy's imagination, and by being herself a porter she will, in the end, contribute to the growing up of the boys who reach Peter Pan's realm.[33] Neverland, thus, measures the distance between imagination and growing up: it is a specially designated space for the characters' access to other ontological levels. The Darling brothers enter Neverland through a simple window, which will actually become the window towards their coming of age. Such facts prove, once again, that portals in fantasy literature represent the main instrument used in building fictional worlds.

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Notes

[1] See Lori M. Campbell, *Portals of Power*, Jefferson, McFarland & Company, 2010.

[2] Arnold van Gennep, *Rituri de trecere*, Iaşi, Polirom, 1996.

[3] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," Web: http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf, accessed on 15. 08. 2014.

[4] Time became, in the last decades, a rather flexible and disputed concept. Some physicists even have doubts regarding its actual existence.

[5] Marius Conkan, "On The Nature of Portals in Fantasy Literature," in *Caietele Echinox*, Vol. 26/ 2014.

[6] Hilary P. Dannenberg, "Windows, Doorways and Portals in Narrative Fiction and Media," in Elmar Schenkel and Stefan Welz (eds.), *Magical Objects: Things and Beyond*, Berlin, Galda + Wilch Verlag, 2007, pp. 181-198.

[7] Idem, *Coincidence and Counterfactuality: Plotting Time and Space in Narrative Fiction*, Lincoln and London, University of Nebraska Press, 2008.

[8] I use *landscape in-between* and *space in-between* because I understand them as relevant concepts for my theory on portals.

[9] Hilary P. Dannenberg, "Windows, Doorways and Portals in Narrative Fiction and Media," p. 183.

[10] Subha Mukherji, "Thinking on Thresholds," in Subha Mukherji (ed.), *Thinking on Thresholds: The Poetics of Transitive Spaces*, London, Anthem Press, 2013.

[11] Gillian Beer, "Windows: Looking In, Looking Out, Breaking Through," in Subha Mukherji (ed.), *Thinking on Thresholds: The Poetics of Transitive Spaces*, London, Anthem Press, 2013, p. 11.

[12] J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan şi Wendy*, translated by Raluca Ghenţulescu, Bucureşti, Cartex 2000, 2012.

[13] In this essay, the fractal is understood as a spatial model infinitely replicated, having as a starting point Benoît Mandelbrot's theory in *Obiectele fractale: formă, hazard, dimensiune*, Bucureşti, Nemira, 1998. Mandelbrot focuses on mathematical models.

[14] Allison B. Kavey, "'I do believe in fairies, I do, I do': The History and Epistemology of Peter Pan," in Allison B. Kavey and Lester D. Friedman (eds.), *Second Star to the Right: Peter Pan in the Popular Imagination*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 2009, pp. 75-104.

[15] Lori M. Campbell, *op. cit.*

[16] For e.g., on the cosmic level a black hole can be seen as a portal, inside of which, according to cosmologists, the known laws of physics cease to function. It is possible, therefore, that the way in which we understand fictional space can no longer be

applied on portals in literature. Such a situation will, probably, lead to the discovery or even invention of new concepts and theoretical categories.

[17] In this essay, I am reordering Allison B. Kavey's ideas to serve my own purposes and demonstration. Kavey analyzes the history and epistemology of Peter Pan.

[18] Allison B. Kavey, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

[19] Lucian Boia, "Cu privire la funcţia imaginară a insulei," in Lucian Boia (ed.), *Insula: Despre izolare şi limite în spaţiul imaginar*, Colegiul Noua Europă, 1999, p. 8.

[20] J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," Web: http://public.callutheran.edu/~brint/Arts/Tolkien.pdf, accessed on 15. 08. 2014.

[21] Gillian Beer, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

[22] Subha Mukherji, *op. cit.*, pp. xxii-xxiii.

[23] Gillian Beer, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

[24] Arnold van Gennep, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

[25] Allison B. Kavey, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

[26] Adelbert von Chamisso, *Extraordinara poveste a lui Peter Schlemihl*, Translated by Petru Manoliu, Bucureşti, ESPLA, 1956.

[27] Corin Braga, *10 studii de arhetipologie*, Iaşi, Polirom, 2006.

[28] Allison B. Kavey, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

[29] Gillian Beer, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

[30] Such an inner portal is the wardrobe through which Lucy enters the Narnia inside of her.

[31] Allison B. Kavey, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

[32] Lori M. Campbell, *op. cit.* p. 85.

[33] Ibidem, mainly the chapter "Lost Boys to Men: Romanticism and the Magic of the Female Imagination in J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* and Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*."