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FANTASTICAL WORLDS AND THE ACT OF READING IN *PETER AND WENDY*, *THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA*, AND *HARRY POTTER*

by Grace Rebecca Monroe

(A Thesis)

Presented to the Faculty of

Bucknell University

In Partial Fulfillments of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts in English

Approved:

Adviser: Virginia Zimmerman

Department Chairperson: Anthony Stewart

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(Date: month and Year)

Next moment he was standing erect on the rock again, with that smile on his face and a drum beating within him. It was saying, “To die would be an awfully big adventure.”

J.M. Barrie, *Peter and Wendy*

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Abstract

My thesis explores the relationship between the child reader and the protagonist within fantasy children's literature. By examining the experience of the protagonist in the text, I am complicating the notion of escapism in children's literature and offering a new way to look at how children read. Using narrative theory and Freud's *fort-da*, I detail how the events within a novel, the danger and catharsis within the plot, show how both the protagonist and the reader use narrative to better understand and cope with anxieties in their worlds. The novels and series that I discuss, *Peter and Wendy* (1911), *Narnia* (1950-1956), and *Harry Potter* (1997-2007), all contain fantasy worlds that clearly demonstrate the identification between the reader and the protagonist, as well as their shared experiences in a space that mimics the psychological landscape of the child. In order to closely examine these works and dissect the reading experience, I have structured my analysis much like a narrative. In Chapter 1, I detail how identification is formed when the reading experience first begins, leading up to the entrance of the protagonist into the fantasy world. Chapter 2 discusses the action of the novel, which displays *fort-da* sequences where anxieties and fears are faced by the protagonist. Lastly, Chapter 3 discusses the endings of the novels and the child reader's exit from the reading experience.

Introduction

Picking Up the Book: Children's Fantasy Literature and Narrative

It is very likely that most, if not all, adults can recall a book from their childhood. Children's literature, while largely overlooked as a genre for critical analysis until the last half century, is where many of our first encounters with literature took place. Therefore, it would be remiss for us to ignore the importance that this genre has in our development as scholars and people. Karen Coats emphasizes this importance in her text *Looking Glasses and Neverlands: Lacan, Desire, and Subjectivity in Children's Literature* when she states that "What we get from children's literature are the very patterns and signifiers that define our understanding of and our positions with respect to the other and, in doing so, structure our sense of self. The literature we encounter as children, then, should be seen as central to the formation of subjectivity" (Coats 4). By interrogating pieces of children's literature, we can formulate not only how children form their sense of self, but also how we in turn have been affected by our earliest experiences with reading.

A common association with children's literature is escapism, where it is believed that children can enter a world devoid of the problems they face in their reality and can disappear into the novel's world of fantasy. I disagree with this notion, because the nature of the novel, where problems are encountered and anxieties are brought forth, contradicts this idea of an escape. I am arguing that the children's novel, specifically novels that deal with a fantastical world, utilize fears that children have and put them to work within the plot, allowing the reader to relieve their anxieties. For them, reading is more of an exercise than an escape. I propose to use Freud's model of *fort-da* to complicate the idea of escapism in children's fantasy novels. This model will

show that the escape truly comes in the return to reality for both the protagonist and the child reader because of the dangers that these fantasy worlds possess. The scenes of action giving way to a resolution become the tension and release, the *fort* and the *da*, which becomes a way for the child reader to experience catharsis. However, the ultimate release occurs at the end of the novel, where the child reader returns alongside the protagonist to the familiar reality where the novel begins. My argument will focus on this imaginary world in the novel, where the child reader experiences the characters leaving their "reality" and entering a fantasy world where they can tackle issues of identity. I hope to give evidence that through their experiencing these events with the characters in the story, the child reader meta-textually reconciles their own identity outside the world of the novel.

I aim to expose the relationship between reality and imaginary spaces for the child reader, as well as to show how identity is formed through engagement with these spaces. This in turn will be used to show how the novel itself is a pedagogical tool, where the experience of the reader influences their world outside the novel. To show these relationships, I have chosen three novels/series from the twentieth century that each exhibit a different model of a fantastical world. The novels I use to illustrate these points include *Peter and Wendy* by J.M. Barrie (1911), *The Chronicles of Narnia* series by C.S. Lewis (1950-1956), and the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling (1997-2007). This survey is beneficial not only because it explores how the structures of fantasy worlds complicate the idea of escapism into literature, but also because each of these novels provides a different structure of imaginary worlds that complicate the reader's experience within them. I am interested in investigating the key differences between the relationships of these worlds to reality, and in turn how these relationships affect the child reader's experience.

When looking at the fantasy novels of *Peter and Wendy*, *Narnia*, and *Harry Potter*, it is clear to see that they all contain two separate worlds. First, they contain a realistic world that operates under the same rules as our world, or the law of the father.[1] They often utilize real-world locations, such as London, England, as seen in *Peter and Wendy*, or Surrey, in *Harry Potter*. Next, they contain a distinct fantastical world, such as Neverland in *Peter and Wendy* or Hogwarts in *Harry Potter*. For the purposes of my analysis, the realistic and fantastical worlds depicted in the novels can together be classified as an imaginary world, the world the reader enters when they actively engage with the novel. If the reader understands that this realistic world is limiting to the protagonists, then we can see identification between the reader and the protagonist begin here because there is an immediate commonality – they both feel dissatisfied with their worlds. In my discussion of these novels, I will detail the problems that arise within the opening scenes of the novel that eventually lead to the protagonist's desire to escape their realistic world and venture into the fantasy world.

What I must point out here is that my uses of "real" and "imaginary" are not to be confused with the terms that Jacques Lacan uses in his theory. While I do use his concept of the law of the father, this is meant to describe the power structure of both the realist and real worlds, not necessarily refer to his theories specifically. In other words, I am using his terminology to differentiate how power operates and who it is given to in the fantasy world. Additionally, even though I am using psychoanalysis to discuss these novels, I am not using Lacan to describe these worlds. Instead, the designation of each world (real, imaginary, realistic, and fantasy) is simply my own framework that I have devised to better discuss the relationships between worlds within

[1] This is referring to the patriarchal power structure of society, based on Lacan's theory. See *Ecrits*, pp. 50.

the novels that I am discussing. When I utilize psychoanalysis, it is to give meaning to these children's novels in a way that prioritizes the child and provides a way to read these novels as an avenue for the child reader to practice therapeutic reading.

Therapeutic reading views reading as an experience that allows the child to better understand and cope with the world around them through the act of reading. This is similar to a concept called bibliotherapy, which Michelle Abate describes in her work "'The Bombs Were Coming—And So Was I': The Trauma of War and the Balm of Bibliotherapy in Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*." She explains that "by examining a novel, poem, story, or play that relates to a person's situation, individuals are able to confront their feelings and cope with their experiences" (Abate 55). What makes my analysis different from previous investigations into bibliotherapy and therapeutic reading is my layering of the *fort-da* process over narrative within fantasy worlds as a way for readers to form identification with the protagonist. To discuss this therapeutic reading and its performance in the fantasy world more clearly, I will discuss Freud's theories surrounding repetition and how it is utilized to work through anxieties and trauma in the following paragraphs.

In "Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through," Freud discusses the use of repetition in therapy. As he describes in this work, he maintains that by using transference, the redirection of feeling, a patient is able to render their repetitions (compulsions) as something useful to uncover past traumas. He states that "From the repetitive reactions which are exhibited in transference we are led along the familiar paths to the awakening of the memories, which appear without difficulty…after the resistance has been overcome" (*Remembering, Repeating* 153). In other words, repetition becomes therapeutic, allowing the patient to work through

trauma. What benefits my analysis here is to see children's literature as the repeating and working through – instead of remembering trauma, books offer them a space where they observe problems or explore anxieties about problems to come. This is not to say that children do not have trauma; rather, the lens of therapeutic reading helps us to see how children observe or experience problems such as death and use the landscape of the fantasy world to "play" with the anxieties surrounding them. The children's fantasy novel, then, for the child reader becomes a space for self-therapy.

Fantasy literature offers fictional examples of transitioning between worlds. These transitions are analogous to the reader's experience of their movement from the real world to the imaginary world of the fiction. By forming an identification between reader and protagonist, the child reader may then, alongside the protagonist, experience danger and anxieties in a world dissimilar to their own. As Deborah O'Keefe explains, "fantasy books don't just help readers to develop themselves, they help them respond to all that is the non-self" (O'Keefe 18). What O'Keefe points out here is that the reader not only internalizes the experiences that protagonists have in the fantasy space, but they also utilize these experiences to respond to outside forces. This "foreign" fantasy space adds another level of separation between the events of the novel and the real world, while at the same time acting as "not simply an unreal fantasy land created to entertain children; it is a meaningful visualization of the inner landscape of the psyche where the internal conflicts that lead to personality growth are acted out" (Rigsby 11). What Rigsby is saying expounds upon O'Keefe's description of internal development and external reactions. Again, we see here a clear pattern of how fantasy spaces allow the child reader to explore fears, conflicts, and anxieties by providing a space that is fictional, foreign, and separates their

consciousness from the real world. This creates a safe space where they are free to challenge and grow themselves in order to better deal with the world around them. By relying upon these analogies of the fantasy space to the reader's psyche to create a foundation of identification between the child reader and the protagonist, I will discuss how the *fort-da*, or tension and release, of events within the novel lend to a larger pattern, dealing with themes such as death, loss, and mortality.

This fantasy world is a space where power can be achieved by the protagonist because the fantasy space operates under different rules and laws than the realistic world. Because the protagonist is unable to exercise power in the realistic world[2] (which echoes the reader's own lack of power in the real world), they seek to escape, finding refuge in the fantasy space. The fantasy world becomes a space where they can exercise more freedom and power. Unlike the reader's real world, this acquisition of power is entirely possible for the protagonist in fantasy. Identification between reader and protagonist allows the child reader to experience this liberation through the characters in the story. In order to discuss this "working through" that protagonists, and through them, readers, enact, it is necessary to turn to Peter Brooks' theories on narrative. Brooks describes in his book *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* that the action of the novel is characterized by a series of *fort-da* sequences, which act as a type of "play" between the tension and the catharsis gained through the scenes within the novel. This game of *fort-da* is crucial to the interpretation of the fantasy novel. Originally theorized by Freud, this game evolved out of his observation of a child pushing away a toy and reeling it back in,

[2] This is referring to restrictions on a child's/protagonist's power by parental control and general lack of freedom due to their status as children in society.

repeating the act over and over again. This *fort-da* game was originally used by Freud to demonstrate the loss of the mother, where he claimed that the child was taking agency by exerting its power over the toy, hence over the abandonment of the mother. The pushing away of the toy was the child's way of reenacting the mother leaving, but then pulling her back in when the child wanted (Brooks 196). If the novel provides a similar release for the child reader, then it becomes a space where they can emotionally live out the dangerous events or trials that occur (the *fort*), but where they can also extricate themselves from the world of the imaginary and return to their reality unharmed (*da*).

In fantasy novels, the child reader effectively experiences emotions while shadowing the child protagonist within the story, escaping into the imaginary world with them. However, this escape is not really an escape as traditionally believed. This escape entails danger and encounters with identity crisis, physical altercations, and the threat of death to the protagonists within the story. Scenes involving near-death experiences and a last-minute escape would be a way for the plot to show the tension, or *fort* (encountering death) to lead to an escape (*da*) that provides catharsis, or a movement away from unpleasure. This relates back to the idea of escapism in children's literature that I previously discussed. When considering escapism, it is important to consider that the fantasy world is not devoid of the problems the child readers face in their reality. There are often dangerous situations that child protagonists face in the fantasy world. These scenes of peril for the protagonists therefore complicate the idea of the novel as an escape for the child reader, because the reader does not escape the danger from their reality within these stories.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principal*, Freud describes this same phenomenon: "…even under the dominance of the pleasure principle, there are ways and means enough of making what is in itself unpleasurable into a subject to be recollected and worked over in the mind" (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 160). Therefore, plot allows this "working over" that Freud describes. For the child reader, this feature of plot allows them to tackle fears and anxieties that they may be relatively powerless to resolve in the real world. Deborah O'Keefe describes this in her book *Readers in Wonderland: The Liberating Worlds of Fantasy Fiction: From Dorothy to Harry Potter* when she states that "Externalizing inner processes through play in fantasy gives a child mastery rather than terror" (O'Keefe 45). What she points out here is crucial: by using the act of reading as a way to safely encounter their fears, child readers may gain mastery over those fears by living through the action of the novel via the protagonist.

As I have discussed, an important part of my analysis is to discuss the relationship between the child reader and the protagonist in fantasy novels and how identification allows this relationship to form. However, it is necessary to first situate my analysis in the context of current conversations around children's literature. Since the 1984 publication of her work entitled *The Case of Peter Pan, or, The Impossibility of Children's Fiction*, Jacqueline Rose's claim that children's literature is "impossible" has caused debate within the scholarly community. She argues that "Children's fiction is impossible…[because] it hangs on an impossibility, one which it rarely ventures to speak. This is the impossible relation between adult and child" (Rose 1). Rose's ideas challenge the conception of children's literature as a whole by arguing that the adult author cannot write for the child because the adult cannot truly know or understand the experience of the child. This is an idea that has stimulated critical conversation for over 40 years

and caused backlash from many critics. In their essay “The (Im)Possibility of Children's Fiction: Rose Twenty-Five Years On,” David Rudd and Anthony Pavlik cite many of these critics, such as Peter Hunt, who suggests that “although she was right to draw attention to the ‘power imbalance between writer and reader,’ he thinks her wrong to see this as ‘unique to children’s literature,’ for ‘[e]very literary act—and probably every speech-act or communication-act—contains this imbalance’” (qtd. In Rudd and Pavlik 224). Hunt calls to our attention a very important point – while the relationship between the adult writer and the child reader makes the literature itself a battleground for meaning, it can be argued that *all* fiction contains this issue. Hunt is correct in his statement, but he certainly does not address the inability of the author to fully understand the child’s experience and therefore the power imbalance that arises. Julia Kristeva’s ideas about the author of adolescent fiction complicate this debate when she asserts that “…a novel is the work of a perpetual subject adolescent” (Kristeva 139). What she means here is that the author is in fact closer to their subject than Rose would argue. If we see the author as a perpetual adolescent themselves, this closes some of the gap between adult authors and their child audience. While the gap Rose identifies should not be ignored, my focus on child readers emphatically returns children to the equation – the adult author may have to imagine the child character and the audience of children, but the child reader does not experience this gap.

In my analysis, like Jacqueline Rose, I hope to challenge the overall conclusion that “Children’s fiction rests on the idea that there is a child who is simply there to be addressed and that speaking to it might be simple” (Rose 1). My argument focuses on the opposite: that child readers are active and “living” through the novel’s action. J.R.R. Tolkien’s beliefs line up with my own in his essay “Children and Fairy Stories” when he states that “What really happens [in

the novel] is that the story-maker proves a successful 'sub-creator.' He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he creates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside" (114). Belief in the action of the story allows readers to become part of the action and part of the world within the story. This complicates the assertion that the child is a passive listener because they actively participate in stories. This thesis explores the child reader's active engagement with the action of the novel through scenes of danger and catharsis (*fort-da*), culminating in a therapeutic experience that allows them to alleviate fears and anxieties that exist in the real world.

Peter and Wendy

Peter and Wendy was published in 1911 by J.M. Barrie, based upon a play entitled *Peter Pan, or the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up.* [3] Both the novel and the play tell the story of the Darling family and Wendy, Michael, and John's adventures with Peter Pan, an orphan who lives in Neverland and never grows up[4]. In the novel, the children are visited by Peter, who flies to their window with the aid of pixie dust. He convinces Wendy to come with him because the Lost Boys, his followers in Neverland, want to hear her stories. She consents, on the condition that her brothers come with them. When they arrive in Neverland, they play make-believe and live in a burrow under the ground, encountering dangers and adventures. Captain Hook is the main antagonist on the island, and as the sworn enemy of Peter Pan, attempts to harm the Lost Boys and Wendy on more than one occasion. He is finally able to capture the children and is about to

[3] Barrie developed this story based on his real play with the Llewelyn Davies boys (*Peter Pan* 16-17).

[4] For the purposes of my analysis, I will be primarily focusing on the novel version of the story; however, I will reference aspects of the play when I discuss narration and the relationship between narrator/adult and child reader.

make them walk the plank when Peter saves them, with Captain Hook eventually falling to his death into the gaping mouth of a crocodile. The children return to England, and the Lost Boys are adopted by the Darlings. Wendy is allowed to return to Neverland with Peter once a year, but he soon forgets to fetch her, and all the children grow up. Wendy's own daughter is able to leave with Peter, and this cycle continues even after Wendy's death. This novel, along with its predecessor, the theatrical production, has sparked scholarly conversation revolving around the figure of the child, imagination, the conscious mind, and influence on popular culture. What I am choosing to focus on with my analysis for this novel is the way in which fear and anxieties, largely about mortality, are exercised through danger in Neverland via *fort-da*, and how the over-arching theme of death is "worked through."

The Chronicles of Narnia

The Chronicles of Narnia series by C.S. Lewis records the history of the fictional land of Narnia. The series shows the events that occur in Narnia from the world's creation in the *Magician's Nephew,* to the *Last Battle* when Narnia is destroyed. Published between 1950 and 1956, this series tells the story of children encountering the land of Narnia and addresses themes such as good and evil, heavily influenced by Lewis's own Christian values.[5] The first of these children, Digory and Polly, witness the creation of Narnia and bring to the land an evil force, later to be known as the White Witch. The Pevensie children come to Narnia from a wardrobe, which was made from the wood of a tree whose seed originated from Narnia. It is in Digory's, or the Professor's, home that they discover Narnia and assume their destiny to reign as Kings and

[5] I am choosing to focus on *The Magician's Nephew*, *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, and *The Last Battle*. These books specifically show the evolution of the land of Narnia that ends in its eventual destruction.

Queens of Narnia. With the help of Aslan, a Christ-like figure, they defeat the White Witch and restore Narnia to peace. Of the Pevensie children, only Edmund and Lucy return in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, along with their cousin Eustace. Their mission in this novel is to find the Lords of Narnia who were lost at sea. They eventually find the end of the world after finding the Lords and encountering adventures along the way. Lastly, *The Last Battle* describes the events leading up to Narnia's destruction, ending with all of the protagonists from the previous novels returning to live out an eternity in the "real Narnia," a heaven-like setting. Much critical conversation surrounding these novels has a focus on the Christian basis that Lewis used for much of his writing. However, I am choosing to focus on the aspects of death and danger, as with *Peter and Wendy*. The life and death cycle that the novels exhibit is crucial to looking at the *fort-da* within and between the novels.

Harry Potter

The *Harry Potter* series, written by J.K. Rowling from 1997 to 2007, tells the story of Harry Potter, a young wizard who was marked as extraordinary from the time he was one year old, when the dark wizard Lord Voldemort was unable to kill him and instead seemingly perished. Harry, being an orphan, was sent to live with his non-magical Aunt and Uncle, who largely ignored both Harry and any magic. On his 11th birthday, Harry is invited to attend Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, where he learns about his fame, learns magic, and finds that Lord Voldemort isn't completely gone as everyone had assumed. The books in this series follow Harry as he goes through school, culminating in his final stand-off with Lord

Voldemort.[6] Each school year, excepting year three depicted in *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry has an encounter with Voldemort that reveals Voldemort's intentions to return to full strength and defeat him once and for all. As Harry learns magic and grows up with his friends Ron and Hermione, he uncovers a foreboding prophecy that, between Voldemort and himself, "one cannot live while the other survives" (*Order* 841). This prophecy is what drives Voldemort, and it is only after Harry and his friends destroy Voldemort's Horcruxes[7] that he can be defeated. In *The Deathly Hallows*, Harry, Ron, and Hermione do not return to Hogwarts and instead make it their mission to destroy these parts of Voldemort's soul in order to render him mortal once more. In their final duel, Harry deflects Voldemort's killing curse and it rebounds upon its caster, killing him and bringing peace to the Wizarding World once more. Scholarly analyses of this series take up topics that include mathematics, education, discipline, and time, among many others. Major themes within this series include the battle between good and evil, death, trauma, and loyalty. In my analysis, I will not only investigate death within this series, but also how this theme diverges from the patterns set in the other novels I am discussing.

Structure

The structure of this thesis is organized much like a narrative – with a clear beginning, middle, and end. Because of this structure, each chapter contains a discussion of all three primary sources. I chose to pose my argument in this way to not only better compare each text side-by-

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[6] While it could be argued that some of the novels in this series may be more appropriate for adolescents than children, specifically books 4-7, I am considering all of these novels under the larger umbrella of children's literature because they all follow a character who is a child within the novel/series – Harry begins the series as an 11-year-old boy but ends the series as a 17-year-old.

[7] Horcruxes are the name for an object in which a wizard conceals part of his/her soul. The horcrux allows a wizard to survive any bodily harm and still be alive but requires an act of evil to enable them to split their soul. Voldemort creates seven Horcruxes (*Prince* 497-498).

side, but also because it echoes the structure of fantasy worlds that is so vital to the child reader's identification with the protagonist and the action of the novel. My first chapter, *Out the Window, through the Wardrobe, onto Platform 9 ¾: Beginnings, Entrances, and Intrusions in Reading*, discusses the opening scenes of each novel, leading up to where the protagonists enter the fantasy world. This is also where I will be discussing the intrusive narrator and the relationship between the child reader, the protagonist, and the narrator. My second chapter, *Returns to and Returns of*, discusses the *fort-da* sequences within the middle of the novels, where repetition of dangerous events occur in order to facilitate the therapeutic reading experience. This middle is also important because it leads to the end of the novel and therefore the reading experience where the final *da* provides a cathartic moment for the reader. Lastly, chapter three, entitled *Beginning with the End*, discusses these endings where the novel comes to a close and experiences a "death," where a final *da* is achieved and the reader may exit the reading experience having gained a sense of control over their fears and anxieties, specifically surrounding death and mortality.

Chapter 1

Out the Window, through the Wardrobe, onto Platform 9 ¾: Beginnings, Entrances, and Intrusions in Reading

Fantasy in children's literature operates on two levels: secondary worlds within the text offer an escape to the child protagonist and child readers find a psychologically analogous escape in the book, itself a sort of secondary world. In order to analyze this relationship, it is important to start at the beginning of the novel where the reader first encounters the secondary world(s) of the fantasy. This beginning sets the stage for the child reader's immersion in the world of fantasy and becomes a point from which the *fort-da* experience begins. Before the protagonist of the novel enters the fantasy, or Secondary, world of the novel, the reader first encounters them in the realistic, or Primary, world. This realistic world operates under the same rules and structures that define the real world of the reader. When the protagonist transitions from the realistic world to the fantasy world, they go through thresholds, which take many shapes throughout each narrative: such as the window of the nursery in *Peter and Wendy*, the Wardrobe in *Narnia*, and Platform 9 ¾ in *Harry Potter*. These thresholds have an important role in the *fort-da* of the novel because they are the place where the action of the novel is propelled forward into the fantasy world, where *fort-da* sequences become the vehicle through which desire is exercised for the protagonist and reader.

Before the threshold can be crossed, the beginning of the story opens to a scene that is familiar to the reader. The realistic world, as previously mentioned, operates under the same

rules and laws that govern the child reader's real world.[8] In this space that operates under what Lacan calls the "law of the father,"[9] much like the reader's real world, the realistic world contains problems, such as conflict with their parental figures or their environment, that the protagonist is relatively powerless to change or solve. This invokes in the protagonist a desire to leave their current world and venture to a world with more freedom and power. This desire also echoes the reader's own desire for more power or control that is absent from their real world; therefore, the reader has an outlet to explore the possibility of satisfying that desire through the protagonist. Unlike the reader's real world, this acquisition of power is entirely possible for the protagonist because the fantasy space operates under different rules and laws than the realistic world. J.R.R. Tolkien comments on this desire within the fantasy novel when he describes that these stories "…were plainly not primarily concerned with possibility, but with desirability. If they awakened *desire* satisfying it while often whetting it unbearably, they succeeded" (Tolkien 116, Tolkien's emphasis). The fantasy world becomes the place where the protagonist, and therefore the child reader, can exercise desire which they cannot exercise in their realistic or real worlds. The protagonist is able to fulfill their desire for more power or control over their life through the *fort-da* within the novel through the adventures they encounter. Simultaneously, the child reader is able to live through the protagonist during this action, experimenting with similar feelings of desire that they do not have the power to exercise in the real world. If this beginning is a place where desire stands as Peter Brooks describes (96), then this desire is ultimately the

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[8] This reality is still recognizable as similar to the real world, despite the time or physical place that the novel opens to.

[9] This refers to the Law of the Father that Lacan first references in his seminar collection *Ecritis*, later developing this term over the course of his works as a term to describe the mode through which the power systems of the realistic world are defined.

protagonist's need to liberate themselves from their undesirable situation, where they usually feel alienated or unhappy with their place in life.

In *Peter and Wendy*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and *Harry Potter*, the protagonists are seemingly distinguished from the rest of society within the opening pages of the novels. As Sally Rigsby describes, the isolation "with which the novels open establish[es] the fact of the children's separation from ordinary reality and foreshadow[s] their descent into the imaginative world of the unconscious" (Rigsby 10). This is where the conflict in the realistic world is introduced: the Darling children live in a household governed by their unjust father, the Pevensie children are physically separated from their home and their parents during the Blitz and are sent to a strange new place, and Harry is trapped in the Dursley's abusive home in his cupboard under the stairs. But we must interrogate the notion of isolation that Rigsby uses in her claims. If we see her idea of isolation as estrangement from the realistic world, then her point becomes problematic: certainly many children feel isolated in the real world. It is important to view these isolated spaces rather as places that encourage the readers to identify with the protagonists in the opening of the novels.

Identification between protagonists and readers is important to the *fort-da* process because without this identification, there is no basis on which to evaluate the child reader's experiences. The way that the protagonists of *Peter and Wendy*, *Narnia*, and *Harry Potter* are appealing to their readers is in their believability, because while they all experience fantastical phenomenon in their own reality – finding Peter Pan in the nursery, a short journey into Narnia, or vanishing glass – these protagonists are all seemingly normal before their experiences in fantasy. This only enhances the engagement of child readers with the realistic and fantasy

worlds. If the child reader can believe that Peter Pan may pay them a visit, or they may receive a letter from Hogwarts, then this bond between the reader and protagonist is only reinforced. Additionally, opening scenes that show a protagonist struggling with common problems indicate to the child reader that the protagonist is someone that they can identify with, one like them who lacks power and is limited by their world's rules. These opening scenes of the novel, then, set the stage for the protagonists to cross the threshold into fantasy and experience power in these worlds that they otherwise lack in the realistic world of the novel. In the following analysis, I will detail the realistic features of the imaginary world in each novel and offer insight into the *fort-da* sequence that begins before the threshold is crossed.

The opening scenes of *Peter and Wendy* build tension (*fort*), signaling the Darling children's eventual escape to the fantasy world of Neverland (*da*). This tension begins to build immediately, when the novel opens to a brief discussion of Mr. and Mrs. Darling. Before the children are introduced to the story as active participants in the plot, the narrator makes clear that Mr. Darling didn't seem to want children because of the cost to raise them (*Peter and Wendy* 56). Familial tension caused by this fact aside, the financial situation of the Darlings is also a focal point. The Darlings struggle to maintain a "proper" middle class household, which is displayed when the narrator describes how Nana became the children's nurse:

> Mrs. Darling loved to have everything just so, and Mr. Darling had a passion for being exactly like his neighbours; so, of course, they had a nurse. As they were poor, owing to the amount of milk the children drank, this nurse was a prim Newfoundland dog…No nursery could possibly have been conducted more correctly, and Mr. Darling knew it, yet he sometimes wondered uneasily whether the neighbours talked. (57)

Mr. Darling's unease and worry about what is thought of the family and their (lack of) money eventually becomes the catalyst for the children leaving with Peter Pan – Mr. Darling discards his medicine into Nana's bowl and in his embarrassment ties her up, which allows the children to leave unimpeded (78). The reader is meant to not blame Nana and instead see the flaw in Mr. Darling, who was simply too cowardly to take his medicine. While his problematic character is presented comically, the serious implications of his actions impact the story two-fold: The Darling children know that their father is highly concerned with what others think of their family and they are also aware that their father is not necessarily a figure to respect, yet is the one who wields the power in their household. The children become powerless figures in their home, which of course is not at all uncommon for any child at this time. This oppressive figure of Mr. Darling is also reinforced through the play adaption of the story, where the same actor plays both Mr. Darling and Captain Hook, a vicious pirate (*Peter Pan* 27).

If this household seems unpleasant, then why does the narrator comment that "There never was a simpler happier family until the coming of Peter Pan" (58)? The Darling family, for the most part, does seem happy. However, this is not the question I am answering by discussing the opening sequences of the novel – the protagonists leave their realistic world because they desire change: a change in rules (or lack of), or more power over their world. Wendy, as I will address, is attracted to Neverland because she wants to be a mother to the Lost Boys and take on the power and responsibilities that she associates with that role, not because she is unhappy with her own family. The same can be said for children in the real world: they are limited by their age, so they desire to have a different role and the power that comes with it. However, this does not mean that they are unhappy; they simply wish to be something different and to move beyond the

limitations that accompany youth. The Darling children may be in a happy family, but they still desire change, which is granted when they cross the threshold between their realistic and fantasy worlds and depart for Neverland.

These scenes that build tension and expose the protagonist's desire for change or escape from the realistic world become complicated as they approach the threshold to the fantasy world. The opening scenes of the novel, as previously discussed, are the *fort*, or building of tension, that leads up to a *da*, or release. For the reader, simply entering the reading experience is the *fort*, but for the protagonist this sequence is more complicated. This threshold becomes at once a *da*, release of the tension that had been building to this "escape" from the realistic world, and a *fort*, the tension that builds within the fantasy world itself. These thresholds are incredibly important because they are where the child reader begins to satisfy their desire for power through the protagonist. The character's transition from realistic world to fantasy world at the same time fulfills their own desire to obtain the power they lack in the realistic world.

The tension, or *fort*, of the opening scenes in *Peter and Wendy* comes to its conclusion when the Darling children fly from the nursery with Peter Pan, crossing the threshold from their realistic world to the world of Neverland. Wendy is the first child that Peter speaks to when he arrives in the nursery and is tempted by the world he describes. Wendy asks Peter to stay so that she can tell him more stories, but Peter convinces her that she should come with him to Neverland, tempting her with the ability to fly, to see mermaids, and to gain the respect of all the Lost Boys (77). Leaving London and travelling to Neverland offers Wendy the opportunity to be the Lost Boys' mother, therefore obtaining the power that she perceives that her own mother has. It is interesting to point out here that it is not fathers that are coveted in Neverland, it is mothers.

In a place where Wendy perceives her father as a flawed person who is easily influenced by those around him, she sees her mother as one who arguably has more power. Therefore, Wendy's decision to go with Peter to pursue this power in the fantasy world becomes the driving force behind the children's escape from their home and out their nursery window.

While crossing the threshold provides the *da* to the beginning events of the novel, it is revealed very quickly that the Darling children's time in Neverland is not going to be a safe and conflict-free adventure. During the chapter entitled "The Flight," Wendy, Michael and John begin to fall asleep mid-flight on their way to Neverland with Peter. This becomes dangerous because they are drifting off to sleep and almost plummeting to the sea, and Peter becomes their hero, catching them right before they would hit the water and drown. However, Wendy becomes concerned that Peter isn't saving them as soon as they fall and that he doesn't care about their well-being. The narrator interjects to corroborate this claim, stating that Peter likes the "game" of saving the children (81-82). While of course the danger in this scene resides in the children falling to their deaths, it also foreshadows the complicated landscape that the children must navigate in Neverland.

While Neverland seems tempting to Wendy when Peter describes it, it holds unknown threats to the children that they only find when they arrive. The fantasy world of Neverland is an extremely threatening place for the Darling children because it fuses dreams from the Darling children's realistic world with the fantasy world. The island represents the uncanny for the children, "that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (*Uncanny* 124). The island had existed in the Darling children's dreams and minds before it became a fantasy world to them, as evidenced by Wendy's mother when she was

"tidying up her children's minds" (*Peter and Wendy* 58). This analogy that compares a child's mind to drawers is helpful in discussing Neverland and the psyche. If Neverland is the imaginative landscape of children's minds, then we can easily see how this space can become threatening when it comes to life. The narrator describes this potential when they say that "When you play at [Neverland] by day with the chairs and table-cloth, it is not the least alarming, but in the two minutes before you go to sleep it becomes very nearly real. That is why there are night lights" (59). Neverland is, in effect, the imaginative mind of children that seems harmless and can be played with during the day, but at night it becomes a frightening place full of potential to become a nightmare.

The children knew Neverland from their play time before they ever went there with Peter, which is why "they all recognized [the island] at once, and until fear fell upon them they hailed it, not as something dreamt of and seen at last, but as a familiar friend to whom they were returning home for the holidays" (84). However, the children were always aware of the threatening potential of Neverland: "In the old days at home the Neverland had always begun to look a little dark and threatening by bedtime" (84). This is the intervention of the uncanny – the Neverland they once knew comes to life but is defamiliarized. The "fearsome island" is inhabited by the better parts of their imagination like Wendy's pet wolf, but it also holds threats like pirates and mermaids. The journey and encounter with Neverland serve as a marker to show that the *fort-da* of the fantasy world has begun for the protagonists. The uncanny of the island foreshadows the danger that the children will face there alongside the realization of their desires.

Much like Neverland, the land of Narnia is a threatening place to the children who encounter it; however, the protagonists have no way to know these dangers before they set out on

their adventures. Narnia's presentation to the reader greatly differs from that of Neverland, because the protagonists of Narnia largely enter unintentionally while the Darling children were purposeful in their escape. The threshold through which the Pevensie children enter the world of Narnia in *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* also differs from the window in *Peter and Wendy* because the Pevensie children are able to enter and exit without assistance (such as a guide like Peter Pan or pixie dust). These divergences offer insight into the *fort-da* experiences of the novels and provide a comparison point to discuss the psychological landscape of each fantasy world.

The opening scenes of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* show the Pevensie children when they are taken from their home and "sent to the house of an old Professor who lived in the heart of the country, ten miles from the nearest post office" (*Wardrobe* 3). The fort of the beginning of the novel builds from this point, where the reader discovers that the Pevensie children are taking refuge from London bombings during WWII at this country home. While the children acknowledge that they have more freedom there, they are still living in a place that is unfamiliar and a constant reminder of the impact WWII has on their lives. This isolated setting provides a point for not only reader identification with the protagonists, but also relates feelings of powerlessness between them. While in this unfamiliar place, the children are ultimately forced into the wardrobe all together because they were attempting to evade the housekeeper and a group of adults who were taking a tour of the home (53). It may seem at first glance that the children are being somewhat neglected because they are forced to remain quiet and undetectable in a house where tours and intrusions of strange adults are common. However, it is important that because they are isolated in the house, tension between the siblings arises that ultimately drives

the plot forward. With no other playmates to distract them or parents to keep the peace, Lucy's insistence that Narnia exists sparks Peter and Susan's worry that Lucy is going insane and provokes Edmund's teasing about her "imaginary country" (*Wardrobe* 46-47). While the Professor offers support to Peter and Susan when they come to him over concerns about Lucy, even this parental role is not enough to help the children resolve the rift growing between them and Edmund (47-51).

The beginning of *Wardrobe* gives the reader a well-rounded view of the Pevensie children's situation. The children do have concerns such as being separated from their parents and the sibling rivalry that grows more apparent as the threshold to fantasy draws closer, but ultimately the protagonists seem to be content with playing in the Professor's home. We must remember that the lack of power that the children have is what drives the protagonists into the fantasy world, not their happiness or unhappiness. While in the real world children have little to no power over their lives, the protagonists are given a very different situation in the fantasy world. In Narnia, the Pevensie children discover that they are part of a prophecy where they are destined to rule the land of Narnia (82). While they enter Narnia when it is under the tyrannical rule of the White Witch, they are able to help this world and become its rulers, ushering in a peace that could not be so easily brought to their own war-torn Europe.

The entrances into the fantasy world act as *fort-da* sequences that complicate the building tension, culminating in one release that occurs in the threshold between worlds. Lucy and Edmund both enter Narnia before their siblings, their entrances acting as stand-alone *fort-da* sequences. Lucy is the first to stumble into Narnia when she hides in the wardrobe during a game of hide and seek (10). While there, she befriends Mr. Tumnus and encounters the threat of the

White Witch (*fort*), but with Mr. Tumnus's help she is able to escape unharmed (*da*) (19-23). When she returns to the realistic world, her siblings don't believe that she really went to Narnia and begin to fear that she is going crazy (47). Edmund also enters Narnia for the first time accidentally, as he was following Lucy to "[tease] her about her imaginary country" (27). Edmund meets the White Witch when he enters the wardrobe (*fort*) but is released when he promises to bring his siblings into Narnia to meet her (*da*) (40). The intrusions that these entrances create briefly pull the child reader from the action of the realistic world and plunge them into the world of fantasy. While these encounters that Lucy and Edmund have in Narnia interrupt this building tension in the beginning of the novel which is eventually released when all the siblings enter the wardrobe, the interruptions also help build tension as well. For the child reader, being pulled from the realistic world into the fantasy world to only be put back into the realistic world increases anticipation (*fort*) for the entrance that drives the plot forward into the action of fantasy. The solo entrances effectively delay the collective entrance to the fantasy world where desire is fulfilled. Edmund and Lucy did not have the opportunity to exercise their desire for more power, rather their entrances introduced the villain of the story that must be overthrown: The White Witch. In order to become the Kings and Queens of Narnia, gain power and control over their lives, and repair their relationships with one another, the children must defeat the White Witch. Ultimately, the threshold is crossed into the fantasy world when *all* the siblings are forced to hide in the wardrobe in their efforts to avoid the tour group in the home. The release of tension that builds in the beginning, *da*, and the building of tension caused by entering the fantasy world, *fort*, occurs here.

It is also notable that the children are not aware of when they will be entering Narnia. Excepting Lucy and Edmund, who knew that they would be entering Narnia with Peter and Susan when they are hiding from the tour group, the children are not expecting to be transported to Narnia throughout the series. Peter and Susan are not aware that they are traversing the threshold in *Wardrobe* until it is evident they are no longer in their realistic world, where Peter realizes that Lucy had been telling the truth about the world in the wardrobe: "'…and look there – and there. It's trees all around. And this wet stuff is snow. Why, I do believe we've got into Lucy's wood after all'" (*Wardrobe* 55). Other thresholds into Narnia differ in their presentation but are similar in the transition they provide. For example, in *Prince Caspian*, the children are standing at a train station and are suddenly wrenched into Narnia. Unlike the wardrobe, the children don't have to do anything in order to traverse to Narnia – they simply arrive there on the beach by Cair Paravel (*Caspian* 4-5). Much like the wardrobe, the children are caught unaware, not knowing that they are going to Narnia until they are there. Similarly, Lucy, Edmund, and their cousin Eustace are pulled into Narnia when they least expect it in *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* through a painting in Eustace's home (*Dawn Treader* 9-10). *The Last Battle* also continues this pattern because while the Pevensie's, Digory, and Polly planned to return to Narnia, they were not expecting to be pulled off the train and platform on their way to collect the rings (*Battle* 157-159).

For the Pevensie children and other human characters in the series, entrances into Narnia are not expected. They are called to Narnia when the world needs them, not because they go there purposefully. This complicates the idea of power in the thresholds from reality to fantasy. If the children have no agency in their travel between worlds, then it holds that their desire for

change or more power seems less fulfilled. However, simply being in the fantasy world allows the children to exercise their desire for power in Narnia, despite this lack of agency at the threshold. Despite the fact that the entrances to Narnia, as the Professor puts it, will "'happen when you're not looking for it'" (*Wardrobe* 188), this ultimately does not matter in the discussion of agency because the children acquire the power they desire in the fantasy world.

Harry Potter demonstrates a very different relationship between fantasy and realistic worlds than both *Peter and Wendy* and *Narnia*. In this world, the wizarding and Muggle worlds co-exist simultaneously, and adult wizards are free to travel between them. Magic is present and a part of life in the wizarding world but must be kept a secret from the Muggle world. The relationships between these worlds are integral to looking at Harry and his traversal between worlds, as well as to understand how the *fort-da* process is complicated by these movements. This relationship between worlds is demonstrated immediately, when it is revealed that while Harry was actually born and native to the wizarding world, he grows up in the Muggle world. As Deborah O'Keefe points out, *Harry Potter* "contain[s] no parallel worlds, only overlapping, parallel societies ignoring or accepting or menacing each other; Harry Potter linked all the groups" (O'Keefe 178). Understanding these overlapping worlds, then, helps us understand how Harry interacts with and also defines them.

The beginning of *Harry Potter* opens to a monumental time in the wizarding world – when, as a baby, Harry defeats the feared Lord Voldemort (*Sorcerer's Stone* 11). Unlike *Peter and Wendy* and *Narnia*, in *Harry Potter* the titular character is an orphan. This is significant because while the protagonists in the other examples have parents who have some sort of a presence in the realistic world, either actively in the story (*Peter and Wendy*) or mentioned by

the children (*Narnia*), Harry has no guardian that offers guidance or serves as a loving figure. This immediately seems to put Harry at a disadvantage in the realistic world; however, it is precisely what helps to drive the plot of the narrative. Harry's parents were killed at the hands of Lord Voldemort, which leads to the overarching theme of Harry's destiny to defeat the dark wizard once and for all. Instead of growing up with a loving family, he is instead handed over to his Aunt and Uncle who are painted as less than desirable guardians (12-13). Because of his home life, Harry is forced to find parental role-models within the wizarding world – the world that is actually his true home. Because Harry is an orphan, he is ultimately displaced from his original home in the wizarding world and his "return" to the wizarding world places him in a more powerful position where he can feel that he truly belongs.

In chapter two, the reader can observe why it is so important for Harry to return to the wizarding world. Here, we see that, despite being extraordinary, he was largely ignored by his aunt and uncle: "The [living] room held no sign at all that another boy lived in the house too" (18). Harry was also subjected to sleeping in a cupboard under the stairs in his home even while his aunt and uncle had the resources to give him a much better life (34). After years of being bullied by the Dursley's, Harry is finally able to escape and be where he was not out of place at all, in fact, where he is even regarded as a celebrity. Harry finds out that he holds an ability that he didn't think existed in his world – magic – and that this ability allows him to flee this abusive home and go to a place where he feels that he truly belongs: the wizarding world. Kerrie Ann Le Lievre discusses this escape in her article "Wizards and Wainscots: Generic Structures and Genre Themes in the Harry Potter Series" when she states that "Although each book in the series begins its narrative within the Muggle culture, the protagonist Harry soon makes a transition into

the wizarding world—the wainscot culture (tellingly, this transition is often presented as an escape or a flight)" (Le Lievre 27). This holds true in other novels in the series as well, such as when the Weasley's break Harry out of his room in *Chamber of Secrets* or when Harry runs away from home after he blows up his Aunt Marge in *Prisoner of Azkaban* (*Chamber* 30-34, *Azkaban* 29-30). It is important to note that these flights actually defy the limitations that are put on underage wizards in the wizarding world. Even though Harry learns that the Ministry of Magic, the governing body of the wizarding world, prohibits underage wizardry in the Muggle world, he uses magic to escape his captivity at the Dursleys. Harry's power is still limited in the realistic world, and despite not being allowed to use magic there, he escapes punishment for both infractions (64-65). The laws that constitute the wizarding and Muggle worlds become complicated because of the wainscot structure, a framework where worlds overlap and where the lines between realistic and fantasy are blurred. This structure offers a unique divergence from the power and desire that can be exercised in the fantasy worlds of *Peter and Wendy* and *Narnia*. This structure allows more permeability between the two worlds, creating a space that arguably allows even more identification between the protagonist and the reader. Additionally, because in *Harry Potter* the realistic and fantasy worlds are blended, Harry is limited because of his age in both places – he is still a child and operates under the law of the father in both worlds. However, it is ultimately his ability to practice magic that liberates him from the unpleasantness of his life in the Muggle world.

Harry's first notable entrance into the fantasy world is when he travels to Diagon Alley with Hagrid. This entrance to the wizarding world is through the Leaky Cauldron, an inconspicuous pub that "the people hurrying by didn't glace at" (*Sorcerer's Stone* 68). However,

as with many encounters with magic in this world, ordinary things become extraordinary. In order to get to Diagon Alley, Hagrid must use magic that Harry cannot yet do on his own:

> [Hagrid] tapped the wall three times with the point of his umbrella. The brick he had touched quivered – it wriggled – in the middle, a small hole appeared – it grew wider and wider – a second later they were facing an archway large enough even for Hagrid, an archway onto a cobbled street that twisted and turned out of sight. (*Sorcerer's Stone* 71)

This entrance, much like when Lucy and Edmund enter Narnia, is not where Harry truly crosses the threshold into the fantasy world. However, this journey to Diagon Alley is extremely important to Harry realizing who he really is in the wizarding world. Because Harry is born in the wizarding world and became incredibly famous for his defeat over Lord Voldemort, he holds power in the fantasy world that he certainly did not have in the realistic world. The fact that Harry *comes back* to the wizarding world offers some interesting complications to the *fort-da* of fantasy in these novels. It can be said that because Harry does not remember his life in the wizarding community, these experiences act in much the same way as if he were not native to that world. This pattern of Harry discovering things about the world he would have grown up in continues throughout the series. Ways to travel between fantasy worlds are all new to Harry, such as the bewitched flying Ford Anglia (*Chamber 30)*, apparition, phone booths to the ministry (*Phoenix* 767-768), and portkeys (*Goblet* 71-74).

The threshold between realistic and fantasy worlds that signifies Harry's initiation into the wizarding community and his attendance at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry is ultimately his boarding of the Hogwarts Express on Platform 9 ¾. This entrance is another that requires Harry to walk through a wall, where the fantasy world is concealed on the other side.

Mrs. Weasley explains how to get through, because to Harry the properties of magic are still relatively unknown: "'Not to worry,' she said. 'All you have to do is walk straight at the barrier between platforms nine and ten'" (93). Harry still doubts the laws that govern the wizarding world when he attempts to enter the platform: "He started to walk toward it…He was going to smash right into that barrier and then he'd be in trouble – leaning forward on his cart, he broke into a heavy run – the barrier was coming nearer and nearer…he closed his eyes ready for the crash – It didn't come" (93). This entrance for Harry signifies his escape from the Dursley's and a life where he is largely ignored. While this is at once the *da* of leaving the Muggle world behind, it is also the *fort* of the fantasy space – Harry will encounter an entirely new set of challenges when he attends Hogwarts not only in the first novel in the series, but in every succeeding book.

Narration

The thresholds that I have discussed provide a place for us to situate the *fort-da* experience for both the reader and the protagonist. For the protagonist, the action of the novel before their entrance into the fantasy world is the *fort*, while the threshold between worlds is both the *da* of that sequence and the *fort* of the next (where the dangers and triumphs of the fantasy world take place). For the child reader, they enter the novel as a *fort* and experience the *fort-da* sequences of the novel alongside the protagonist. This relationship is complicated, however, by intrusions of the narrator. These intrusions move the reader in and out of the world of the novel, contributing to the catharsis of the reading experience – when the protagonist is going through scenes of the tense or unfamiliar which creates discomfort, the narrator provides a

brief reprieve by pulling the reader through the fantasy and realistic worlds into the reader's real world.

The narrator in *Peter and Wendy* is present from the beginning of the story to discuss a central theme to the novel: age. They say that "All children, except one, grow up. They soon know that they will grow up…You always know after you are two. Two is the beginning of the end" (Barrie 55). While this is not an intrusion in the action of the novel, thus disrupting the *fort-da* process, this example does show that the narrator is a presence that will be addressing the reader directly. The use of "you" immediately establishes the relationship between the reader and the narrator by allowing them to have a relationship apart from the action of the novel. The narrator also offers insight: "At once the lost boys – but where are they? They are no longer there…I will tell you where they are" (94). This sort of commentary provides a break that intervenes in the *fort-da* sequence, relieving tension and pulling the child reader briefly from the world of the novel. At some points in this narration, these pulls from the world of the novel open an opportunity for the narrator and child to function as one. Such examples are found when the narrator addresses the reader (or listener) as "we." This is evident in many places in the text, notably when the narrator discusses the possibilities of what adventure they will tell. They ask the reader: "Which of these adventures will we choose? The best way will be to toss for it" (111). Carrie Sickmann Hann describes this reference to "we" as the creation of the co-narrator, which is "created in part by the author's distinctive collapsing of narrator and narratee into a metafictive, plural first-person 'we'" (Han 156). Han's analysis discusses the relationship between narrator and listener/reader:

> [Barrie] merges the roles of narrator and narratee into a "co-narrator" that inscribes implied readers as potential implied authors who share responsibility for creating the narrative. Because he uses age to differentiate between two different modes of reading/storytelling—adults provide the "bald narrative" that children fill out with "interesting bits"—his experimental narrative style necessarily confuses our ability to differentiate between the two. In other words, the co-narrator is adult and child, narrator and narratee. (155)

If we accept Han's analysis, then, the author provides the reader with an opportunity to create or imagine their own parts to the story. The reader is drawn out of the story only to be pulled back in, but this time they have power to fill in the "interesting bits." Therefore, "Barrie's fictional and implied child readers embrace the role of reader and author simultaneously, and they function as models for their adult counterparts" (Han 147). This means that the child reader (or listener) has command over the narrative rather than only the adult author, or narrator, controlling the reading experience.

It is important to note here that this relationship between the adult and child has sparked debate over the possibility of children's fiction itself since Jacqueline Rose's work *The Case of Peter Pan, or, The Impossibility of Children's Fiction*. As I discussed in the introduction, she asserted in this book that the relationship between the child and the adult is impossible, therefore children's fiction itself is impossible.[10] What is not addressed in responses to Rose's claims is the inability for the author to fully understand the child's experience and therefore the

[10] See Introduction, pp. 8-9.

power imbalance that arises. Viewing the child reader (or audience) as a co-narrator that Han describes closes some of this gap that Rose observed between adult and child. If the child is active in the reading experience through those narrative interruptions, then we see them in a role that creates plot and meaning rather than acting as a passive bystander.

Peter Brooks cites a similar notion of the adult/child or narrator/narratee relationship in his discussion of plot. His point, however, involves the drive of the narrative, or the desire of the reader. What he discusses is the intentions of the reader, and how those intentions ultimately give the text meaning:

> ultimately the voice that speaks in the text is that of the reader, in that it is in the reader's interest, in his name, that the story must be told. Here, as narrators, narratees, and characters become compounded and interchangeable – and the narrated and the narrating occupy shifting positions – we have very nearly a literal realization of Barthes's point: the distance between telling and listening, between writing and reading, has collapsed; the reader has been free to speak in the text, toward the creation of the text. (Brooks 304)

What Brooks describes through this interpretation of Barthes's theory, then, is that the child reader has control over the plot because they are for whom the story is told. The child readers are in effect creators of the story, wherein they are at once the one who tells the story, the one being told the story, and the characters within that story. If we see these theories of Han and Brooks moving together and the narrator and narratee roles in turn moving with one another, then we see a much more engaged child reader rather than a child who is simply being read to. This challenges Rose's conception of the impossibility of children's literature. Adult writers may construct the language of the children's novel, but it is ultimately the child reader who gains

control through co-narration and creation of the text. In tearing down this relationship on which Rose bases a large part of her argument, that "Children's fiction sets up a world in which the adult comes first (author, maker, giver) and the child comes after (reader, product, receiver), [and] where neither of them enter the space in between" (Rose 1-2), then we begin to see that children's literature is in fact possible. If, as Brooks states, the roles of narrator and narratee are broken down and it is the reader who is making meaning, then there is no projection of the adult author onto the child reader.

This interaction with the text, where the child reader is the co-narrator or "creator" of the story, has a significant presence in *Peter and Wendy* and in the play that it was adapted from: *Peter Pan, or the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up*. While the play follows the same story line as the novel, it offers an opportunity to see this interaction between the child and the story because an audience is involved to witness and participate in parts of the play. One such example is when Tinkerbell is dying and Peter rushes to her aid, calling upon the children in the audience to clap to save her ("Peter Pan" 243-244). The children in the audience then become an influence in the narrative as they clap to show Tinkerbell that they believe in fairies to revive her. Their active participation in the narrative is shown here: the audience's agency is what "saves" Tinkerbell. The child audience's display of narrative power was vital to the believability of the play and reinforces the *fort-da* of the reading experience because the control that the audience is offered by becoming co-narrators of the story relieves some tension caused by the distressing notion that Tinkerbell is in danger. In the novel *Peter and Wendy*, the translation from the stage version of the story takes on a slightly different form. Instead of affording the reader a chance to be a co-creator in that scene, the narrator merely intrudes to provide catharsis: "Peter flung out his arms.

There were no children there, and it was night time; but he addressed all who might be dreaming of Neverland…'Do you believe?' he cried." The narrator goes on to say that while "Many clapped. Some didn't," Tinkerbell was still revived by their belief (146). While these two scenes differ in their presentation to the reader, they act in much the same way: the brief detours from the story such as this allow the child to exercise narrative power, extricating themselves from the action of the novel to provide catharsis, relieving tension when it is at its height.

Similarly, the intrusions of the narrator in *Narnia* also occur in moments when there is an immediate threat to the protagonists of the story. When Edmund returns to the White Witch and discovers her true evil nature, the readers end chapter nine with the tension of this revelation. At this point in the narrative, the White Witch leaves her castle with Edmund as her hostage in order to capture his siblings (*Wardrobe* 99). The next chapter begins with the narrator addressing the reader, saying "Now we must go back to Mr. and Mrs. Beaver and the three other children" (100). When the narrator addresses the reader here, they pull the reader from the action in the story, temporarily taking them out of the *fort-da* experience to provide a relief from the tension that occurs during the scene with the White Witch.

At another significant time of tension within the novel, the narrator also intrudes to pull the reader out of the imaginary world. When Aslan sacrifices himself in exchange for Edmund's life, Susan and Lucy rush to untie him but find the knots are too tight. In a state of grief, the two protagonists are greatly distressed, much like the child reader would be in this scene (158). The narrator breaks in to the narrative here, saying that "I hope no one who reads this book has been quite as miserable as Susan and Lucy were that night; but if you have been – if you've been up all night and cried till you have no more tears left in you – you will know that in the end there

comes a quietness" (158). Offering this break from the *fort* caused by this scene not only takes the reader out of the tension and thereby relieving it, but also provides relief through their reassurance. The narrator offers a kind of solace through their description of "quietness" after great sorrow. While this is surely not the resolution, or *da*, that is provided when Aslan returns from the dead, this brief detour from the novel provides a slight reprieve for the reader.

Unlike the other novels, there is no obvious intrusive narrator in *Harry Potter*. While there seems to be little connection between the narration style of this series and the other novels, the fact that it is a series of novels that create one cohesive story is in itself acting similarly to narrative intrusion. However, while the other novels show a narrator breaking into the narrative during times of heightened tension, or *fort*, before a releasing *da*, the "break" in a series comes at the end of each novel where the final *da* of reading occurs. A way to approach this complication of the *fort-da* process and narration could be to see these endings much like thresholds: it is a *da* as well as a *fort*. The reader knows that the story is not over, therefore there is the tension that accompanies the anticipation for the next installment in the series. This tension carries over into the next novel in the series, where the beginning acts once again as a *fort* in the reading experience. These beginnings then act much the same as the novel(s) that came before them, a repetition that will be discussed in my next chapter for both the *Harry Potter* and *Narnia* series.

The interruption of the *fort-da* experience caused by narrative intrusion, as evidenced, starts in the beginnings of the narrative and moves throughout the story, both in the realistic and fantasy worlds. The many layers of narrative are established within these beginnings and establish the complicated workings of the plot. Immediately, commonalities between the child reader and the protagonist are exposed to promote identification and accessibility and in this

space the events of the novel form. First there is the building of tension, where the protagonist shows a desire for some sort of change and an escape is presented, either purposefully or not purposefully. The thresholds then expose a crucial moment in the protagonist's escape, where they embrace the fantasy world and accept adventure. The *fort-da* sequence overlays these events, signaling the repetition that drives plot within the novel. If we begin to see these plots as a way of the child reader making sense of their own world and their place in it by hitching a ride on the protagonist into worlds of fantasy, then we can begin to understand how plot functions not as something that operates on one level, but on many. As Brooks describes, plot "comes to appear one central way in which we as readers make sense, first of the text, and then, using the text as an interpretive model, of life" (Brooks 19). Using the beginnings as a space that establishes a world through which the reader can identify with the protagonist, in turn experiencing the action of the novel, we begin to see plot taking shape. When we look at beginnings specifically, we start the process of finding repetitions within the novel. The *fort-da* structure of beginnings hints at this repetition. In the beginning, the reader observes the protagonists struggling in some way with their world, then experiences the release of leaving that world, and the tension of entering a new one. The nursery of *Peter and Wendy*, the country home in *Wardrobe*, and Privet Drive in *Harry Potter* all provide a place where the "play" of literature begins (Kidd 123). In the following chapters, discussing the narrative through these repetitions will give insight not only into the child reader's experiences, but also help us question where meaning can be wrested from a text to help us understand reading.

Chapter 2

Returns to and Returns of

In my first chapter, I discuss how the beginning of a novel sets the stage for the protagonist's entrance into fantasy. This fantasy world is the space where the protagonists attempt to find an escape from the realistic world. This fantasy world is where the reader, in experiencing the action of the novel through the protagonist, is able to exercise the *fort-da* of the narrative. This exercise, the tension and release that plot creates, allows the reader to experience uncertainty and danger through the protagonist while still retaining the agency to remove themselves briefly from the plot, as my discussion of narration shows. What is important about the action of the novels after the protagonist enters the fantasy world is the repetition of the *fort-da* game. While the beginnings of the novels contain scenes that illustrate tension and release, the middle of the plot highlights repetitions; these repetitions are a cycle of *fort-da* sequences that propel the plot forward to its eventual end.

Repetition, as Peter Brooks describes in *Reading for the Plot*, is really about the resolution of the plot. He states that "if in the beginning stands desire, and this shows itself ultimately to be desire for the end, between beginning and end stands a middle that we feel to be necessary (plots, Aristotle tells us, must be of 'a certain length') but whose processes, of transformation and working through, remain obscured" (Brooks 96). This process through which the ending is achieved allows the protagonist to work through desire to achieve a satisfying resolution. This desire is key to unveiling the obscurity that the middle of the plot resides in, as Brooks describes. As we can recall from chapter one, the desire that the child protagonist holds in fantasy literature could be the desire to leave the realistic world to obtain more freedom and

power. This power becomes a liberation from the constraints of the realistic world, but the middle of the plot remains the space where the protagonist must "work through" this desire to ultimately achieve liberation through the plot's resolution. Therefore, the continual repetition of the *fort-da* process becomes the avenue through which the ending that supplies the final *da* is found. What this chapter aims to do, then, is to take the middle of the plot out of the obscurity that Brooks describes and to analyze the *fort-da* processes that lead to the resolution of the plot.

Brooks also discusses the repetition of the *fort-da*s within plot as a way to make meaning through the plot: "In fictional plots, these bindings are a system of repetitions which are returns to and returns of, confounding the movement forward to the end with a movement back to origins offering the pleasurable possibility or illusion of 'meaning' wrested from 'life'" (Brooks 108). Putting this matter simply, the ending of the narrative would not be meaningful to the reader if there was no middle, no action in the plot that allowed for tensions and resolutions (or *fort-da*s). If Wendy didn't have adventures in Neverland or the Pevensies did not have adventures in Narnia, then their endings would be both narratively and psychologically unsatisfying. The *fort-da* sequences within the plot allow for the protagonists, and therefore the readers, to experience tension and catharsis, working through the problems posed in the beginning to attain mastery and create an ending that is meaningful (Brooks 98). Within this chapter, I will detail how the *fort-da* repetitions reveal the process through which the protagonists, and therefore the reader, attain mastery over anxieties and tensions that they first encounter in the realistic world.

Before I discuss these *fort-da*s within the narrative, I first acknowledge that there are many types of repetitions in the novels I am discussing – there are repeating symbols such as

wands in *Harry Potter* or the kiss in *Peter and Wendy*, repeating themes of time and how it is manipulated, and narrative interjection, among many others. However, I will be focusing on the *fort-da*s that pertain to death or near-death experience because these repetitions are the highest stakes repetition we see – these experiences clearly show how protagonists are attempting to gain mastery over anxieties surrounding death and mortality. Initially, one may resist the idea that children's literature includes elements that are dangerous or scary to the reader. Deborah O'Keefe points out the *necessity* of danger or pain when she states that "along with lightness and freedom and joy, of course, the realm of fantasy includes pain; Fantasy does not conquer or ignore the long grey night" (O'Keefe 203). Within the fantasy world, the protagonist faces incredible danger: Murderous pirates in *Neverland,* the White Witch in *Narnia*, and Voldemort in *Harry Potter*. The reason for these dangerous elements goes back to *fort-da*, which Freud describes as one of the ways of "…making what is in itself unpleasurable into a subject to be recollected and worked over in the mind" (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 160). The *fort-da* experience is a way to work through the problems that the protagonists (and therefore the readers) face. These anxieties and problems must be experimented with and contemplated in the middle of the plot in order to provide a cathartic resolution because, as Kerrie Anne LeLievre points out, these "problem[s]…must be resolved before [the protagonists] can integrate themselves into their own societies" (Le Lievre 30). Again, we must consider that the cycle of conflicts that occur between the beginning and ending of a plot provides meaning to the resolution, and, as LeLievre states, it is only when these conflicts resolve that protagonists may return to the realistic world and reach a satisfying conclusion. The protagonists return to their realistic world having processed their desires and anxieties and gained mastery over them.

Analyzing specific events that display the *fort-da* sequence within each novel will show how this element in the narrative is key for the protagonist, as well as the reader, to work through anxieties and desires in order to reach an ending that provides a cathartic resolution. In this chapter, I will discuss the action in the middle of the plot within each novel, or the *fort-da*s that show the protagonists' encounters with death, in order to show how the middle of the plot is a space where mastery occurs.

Peter and Wendy presents dangers to the Darling children, like their flight to Neverland that I discussed in chapter one. However, the possibility of death is faced more directly after they reach Neverland, such as the moment where Captain Hook and the pirates confront Peter, Wendy, and the Lost Boys at the mermaid's lagoon. Peter is wounded by Hook and becomes stranded with Wendy on a rock in the middle of the water with the tide rising rapidly. Peter saves Wendy by giving her Michael's kite so she can be carried away but is unable to save himself too. When the water rises, Peter must consider the real possibility of drowning on the rock (*Peter and Wendy* 111-121). The narrator interjects and explains to the reader that "Peter was not like other boys; but he was afraid at last" (121). At the conclusion of the chapter, Peter exclaims that death will be a great adventure.[11] Within this scene, the suspense of Peter in this peril, wounded and close to drowning, allows the child reader to in turn experience tension or suspense. The release of this tension, for both Peter and the reader, comes in the next chapter when Peter is saved by the Never bird (121-124).

Peter is truly scared, which undoubtedly heightens the child readers' realization of the tension that is all the more relieved when he is able to survive. While this tension is enhanced by

[11] Rowling also utilizes this line when she gives it to Dumbledore at the end of *Sorcerer's Stone* (297).

the knowledge that Peter is actually afraid, his exclamation at the end of the chapter is notable. In the face of danger, Peter is still courageous, asserting that death is just another adventure. While the *fort-da* scenario surely provides catharsis, or release of tension, Peter's proclamation can suggest something more to be taken away from this danger. By presenting death as another adventure, the novel provides, for the child reader, a way to cope with the fear that accompanies the idea of death. If Peter Pan is not afraid of death, then why should the readers be? They can not only placate fears surrounding death, and in turn their lack of control over what happens in their lives, but they can also use these scenes to relate to their own reality, providing a catharsis to their fears outside the novel. By experiencing the danger of this scene alongside Peter Pan, the reader can leave the reading experience having gained insight into life-threatening experiences without having to experience them themselves. This is the "working through" that Brooks describes – if a child reader desires more control over their lives, and the possibility of death offers an intimidating event that is not able to be controlled, then this scene could be a way to resolve that anxiety.

Escaping death, as Peter is able to do in *Peter and Wendy*, is a common theme among the novels that I am discussing. This threat of death is also found in the Narnia series, specifically in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe.* In this novel, the children enter Narnia together and very quickly encounter threats to their own lives as well as all the creatures of Narnia. When the Pevensie children attempt to find Mr. Tumnus and find that his house has been ransacked, they stumble upon Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, who tell them of the unfortunate state of Narnia and the White Witch's curse. They learn that they are the four children fated to release Narnia from the White Witch's magic and stand as the only threat to her rule. They are soon forced to flee the

Beavers' home when Edmund, who is unaware of the Witch's evil intentions, leaves to tell her of their arrival in Narnia. This *fort-da* sequence provides tension not only through the danger that the White Witch poses, but also because Mrs. Beaver insists on taking her time to pack before they leave. The three remaining children beg her to hurry, but she insists on trying to pack unnecessary things for their journey, such as a sewing machine or pillows. They soon convince her to leave and are able to escape before the Witch arrives (*Wardrobe* 100-102). In this scene, Mrs. Beaver's character deepens the tension surrounding the White Witch's threat because she delays the journey to safety. While it seems that this sequence does not embody any threat of death, it is necessary to take into account the children's knowledge of the threat they pose to the White Witch. They are fully aware that if they are caught, they are likely to perish at her hand, and Mrs. Beaver's actions only further the tension that this threat of death provides.

Similarly, during their journey to find Aslan and escape the Witch, the children face further danger in their attempt to escape the Witch when they believe that she has caught up to them, spelling disaster for their quest to find Aslan and save Narnia. The children hear sleigh bells, which they are sure are the bells on the Witch's sled (105). However, the *da* of this scene quickly comes when the driver of the sleigh is revealed to be Father Christmas, bringing gifts to the children (106). His arrival signals spring, and the thaw that Narnia is beginning to quickly experience as the children travel through Narnia and begin to break the White Witch's curse. The coming scenes offer further relief from the threat that the Witch poses because this thaw quickens and brings Spring, which the Pevensie children realize means "The Witch would no longer be able to use her sledge," so "[a]fter that, they didn't hurry so much and they allowed themselves more rests and longer ones" (124). The arrival of Father Christmas and Spring serve

much the same purpose as the Never bird – they offer a salvation, however brief, from the source of tension that the antagonist causes. These scenes allow protagonists to elude death and to escape the anxieties that accompany it.

Eluding death is an important part of the movement of the plot because this "working through" anxieties that both the reader and the protagonist are participating in through *fort-da* leads up to much more dangerous brushes with death. In *Peter and Wendy*, the way that death is encountered changes when the Lost Boys and Wendy are kidnapped by the pirates, and they are taken to the ship. In this scene, the children are threatened with walking "the fatal plank" (151-152). The *da* that alleviates this tension comes only after the ticking crocodile is heard, seemingly spelling out the doom for the Lost Boys walking the plank. However, the Lost Boys quickly discover that "…it was no crocodile that was coming to their aid. It was Peter" (153). Here, the *da* is provided, signaling that Peter has come to save the children. The following scene recounts tricking and killing the pirates, with Peter finally kicking Captain Hook, who in turn falls into the waiting jaws of the crocodile (153-161). Not only do the protagonists face danger from the threat of the pirates and the possibility of their own deaths, but some of the children actually kill pirates themselves.

Michael admits this himself when the children return from Neverland, saying that Mr. Darling was "'…not so big as the pirate [he] killed'" (168). In the scene where the pirates were killed, then, death is an experience that has a two-fold effect. While there is fear of actually dying addressed throughout the novel, and certainly a scene with a conflict such as this could raise those fears and tensions surrounding the experience of death, actually dealing in death becomes another way to look at children's agency. The protagonist, and therefore the reader,

experiences catharsis (or *da*) through the act of wielding death – or, more simply, inflicting it on the pirate characters. This role that the children are able to play in the fantasy world, that of killers, is confined to the fantasy world. This is important because, as I will explain later in the chapter, the protagonists are able to retain their innocence, and are thus able to return to the realistic world and continue to live out their childhood.

Similarly, the Pevensie children in Narnia must deal with death in *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*. When the children find Aslan after their escape from the White Witch, their relief in finding the Christ-like figure does not last long because the White Witch soon threatens to kill Edmund, which spurs Aslan to negotiate a deal with the Witch for Edmund's life. At the Stone Table, Aslan is tied up, muzzled, and killed by the White Witch so that Edmund may live. Susan and Lucy overhear her threat to Aslan right before he is sacrificed when she says

> "And now, who has won? Fool, did you think that by all this you would save the human traitor? Now I will kill you instead of him as our pact was and so the Deep Magic will be appeased. But when you are dead what will prevent me from killing him as well? And who will take him out of my hand then? Understand that you have given me Narnia forever…In that knowledge, despair and die." (155)

Her speech undoubtedly prolongs the tension in this scene because Susan and Lucy know that if Aslan is gone, than Narnia and their family will soon be won by evil. Immediately following her address to Aslan, the witch kills him on the Stone Table. Meanwhile, the protagonists who have been spectating the entire event "did not see the actual moment of the killing. They couldn't bear to look and had covered their eyes" (155). The tension from this scene does not immediately resolve itself, and the *da* does not come until the Stone Table cracks,

and they see Aslan restored to life, “shining in the sunrise, larger than they had seen him before, shaking his mane” (162). Aslan’s resurrection, while mimicking the Biblical story of Jesus rising from the dead after sacrificing himself for others, also repeats the theme of death within this novel. Similarly, in the following chapter, Aslan brings the creatures turned to statue by the Witch back to life (167-174). Death is reversed in the Witch’s castle and at the Stone Table. While the children do not deal in death by killing others as the Lost Boys do in *Peter and Wendy*, Peter does kill a wolf in *Wardrob*e. Unlike *Peter and Wendy*, this death is depicted somberly and devoid of the sport and fun that the Lost Boys seem to enjoy while fighting the pirates. This death that Peter must wield is described as “something in a nightmare” (131). However, it is important that this scene, like the others where the Pevensie children encounter death, shows how Lewis puts an emphasis on looking beyond the self in the face of death. There is an outside power that provides a relief that death does not mean an end. In his book entitled *Death and Fantasy : Essays on Philip Pullman, C. S. Lewis, George MacDonald and R. L. Stevenson*, William Gray discusses death within the *Chronicles of Narnia* and its references to Christian beliefs surrounding death and resurrection, stating that “Lewis is creating a new world where he can imagine ‘pictures,’ or ‘myths’ which would express in that world what the ‘true’ myth of what Christ means in our world” (Gray 56). However, he also notes that the series itself offered “an imaginary realm where Lewis tried retrospectively to deal with his sense of cataclysmic loss, and to quest after what his heart ached for, the sense of ‘enormous bliss’ of Eden” (54). While this is a meditation upon the author and not the child reader, this is surely significant in how death is portrayed in the novel. If the series itself provided catharsis for Lewis and helped him to work through his feelings of anxiety surrounding death, then his depictions of death, including

the reversal of death that Aslan provides or the comfort that a higher power gives, could also provide that same effect for the reader.[12]

While the children do not have the agency to overcome death themselves in Narnia, after the battle at the end of the novel Lucy is able to revive Edmund on the battlefield. However, it is important to note that Lucy does not inherently have this power, she instead uses a magic cordial gifted to her by Father Christmas to save Edmund's life. Edmund not only recovers from his wounds, but he also was "looking better than she had seen him look – oh, for ages; in fact ever since his first term at that horrid school which was where he had begun to go wrong" (180). Lucy was able to not only revive Edmund from the brink of death, but the magic also revived the part of him that seemed to no longer exist. Death in this novel became something that is conquerable through magic in Narnia. The evolution that the protagonists make in the story – from a group of siblings with a discordant relationship to one that works together to fight for good, and in the process are able to defeat death and rule the fantasy world justly – shows the *fort-da* process at work by relieving tensions surrounding death (and sibling conflict) and propelling the story to a satisfying conclusion.

This repeating theme of danger through death also signals a return to origins. The beginning of the *Peter and Wendy* hints at Wendy's mortality when the narrator tells the reader that she realized that she would one day grow up (55). In moving back toward the origins of the novel – the revelation of mortality – the story takes on meaning. By repeating encounters with death, the novel calls into question what it means to be a child, the limitations of being an adult,

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[12] The same could be said for both Rowling and Barrie. The exercise of writing can be viewed much like that of reading in that it can offer a therapeutic experience. This is an affirmation to look outside the bounds of the novel for meaning.

as well as confronting what it means to grow up. Similarly, by becoming Kings and Queens of Narnia after the battle against the White Witch, the Pevensie children show that by conquering death they are able to live their desires (*Wardrobe* 183). This move into positions of power is a return to origins for the siblings because their relationships are restored in addition to their powerlessness surrounding their circumstances in the realistic world.[13] These returns to origins are important because the repetitions within the middle of the plot lead to mastery, which the protagonists must attain before they can return to the realistic world. This mastery also allows protagonists to emerge from the fantasy world and embrace the problems they encountered in the realistic world – for Wendy and the Darling children, this could be their problems with their father, and for the Pevensie children, their World War II landscape.

In *Harry Potter*, Harry differs from the other protagonists here because when he returns to the realistic world and his Aunt and Uncle's home on Privet Drive, he remains haunted by death. Harry's nightmares, specifically involving the deaths of Cedric Diggory and Sirius Black, signal that he is working through the grief and trauma that death can cause, but he is not exerting the same control that the Lost Boys do by killing the pirates. While Harry does not get to experience this release, the reader does. This is a point where the bindings between the reader and the protagonist are loosened because the reader is able to experience release as they wait to return to the narrative in the subsequent novels.[14] Despite this difference, Harry's experiences with death are a return to origins because both his origins and these deaths are caused by Voldemort. Death itself is a callback to Harry's origins because it is what became the catalyst for

[13] This is referring to their displacement due to the London bombings in World War II.
[14] When the books were first released, this period would last years. Now that the series has been completed, this period is shorter but has the same effect.

all his experiences at Hogwarts as well as in the Muggle World. This return is important because it is a constant reminder to Harry that he must ultimately face Voldemort, much like at the beginning of the series, and defeat him in order to attain a cathartic end.

While Harry never kills a person himself, it can be argued that he is the catalyst for many deaths throughout the series, such as that of Sirius Black or Cedric Diggory. However, this is unlike the Darling children who kill pirates, or how the Pevensie children battle talking creatures from Narnia.[15] Because the protagonists exercise this type of power over death – the ability to wield it – in only the fantasy world, they do not lose their innocence in the realistic world and can return without consequences. This retention of innocence is important to the *fort-da* sequence because it allows the return to the realistic world to be a release from the darkness and responsibility of the ending within the fantasy world, not simply an extension of the tension that the fantasy world gives to the protagonist. What is notable is that this innocence is what becomes a desirable trait as the children grow into adults. Wendy, John, Michael, and the Lost Boys are able to remember Neverland for only a brief time, and their memories slowly ebb away, leaving them to grow up to be "boring" adults (*Peter and Wendy*). Similarly, for the Pevensie children, their innocence is tied directly to their experiences within Narnia – it is only the children who still remember and believe in Narnia that are given eternal life in the real Narnia in *The Last Battle*. In Harry Potter, Rowling breaks this trend by tying Harry Potter's innocence not simply to his experiences within the Wizarding World, but rather to his direct encounters with Lord Voldemort. Because Harry does not succumb to the Dark Arts and is able to resist the part of

[15] While the anthropomorphic creatures of Narnia are not human, they are valued much like humans in that world. For the purposes of this example, I am likening the evil talking creatures (like that of the White Witch's army) to humans.

Voldemort that resides in him in the form of a Horcrux, Harry retains a purity that diametrically opposes Voldemort. This is a different kind of innocence because it is not tied to experiences, but his relationship to the antagonist.

As I will discuss in chapter 3, the element of death is crucial to plot and it is ultimately the goal of the narrative to find the correct ending, or "death," of the story. This is the ending that provides the most satisfying release, or *da*, to compliment the initial *fort* of the story. If the purpose of the middle of the plot is to find this correct ending, then it makes sense that death is a focal point of this "working through" of anxieties in order to find a satisfying conclusion that displays the mastery that the protagonists have over them. Through the *fort-da* scenes that involve death, the protagonists are able to exert power over death, as I have discussed in this chapter. However, there is also another element to how death is addressed in these novels. It is the child protagonist's own mortality that is at the center of the scenes where they encounter life-threatening situations. In these instances, these novels address death as something that can not only be wielded and defeated but that is also a good thing. By evolving the concept of death throughout the middle of the plot, protagonists come to understand that death is not entirely scary or intimidating as it may be presented earlier in the plot, but rather it is a necessary part of life.

This evolution, or development, of death in the *Narnia* series demonstrates how the protagonists gain mastery over death. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Aslan returns from the dead in an improved state, seemingly larger and grander than before (*Wardrobe* 162), in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Reepicheep sails to the end of the world, up a large, still wave into Aslan's country (*Dawn Treader* 244). These deaths are portrayed to the reader as deaths that offer a new life. Aslan is rejuvenated because his was a wrongful death, and Reepicheep is able

to go to Aslan's country, where it is believed that a heaven-like afterlife exists. To him, much like Peter Pan in his encounter at the Mermaid's Lagoon, this death is not an end but rather it is a beginning to an adventure, where he can go where no one had gone before. *The Last Battle* offers a similar sentiment at its end, that death is another adventure and offers much more happiness than living (210). As I will discuss in chapter three, this novel depicts death as a heaven-like quiescence, or a paradise with no struggle or fear. In these novels, it is notable that attempting to escape death has dire consequences: instead of the chance of a second life, one becomes cursed in this life. This attitude toward death is found in *The Magician's Nephew*, when Digory witnesses the Witch eating the forbidden fruit. Aslan remarks that, while the Witch achieved her heart's desire of having "'unwearying strength and endless days like a goddess," she will live out her days in misery because of her evil heart (*Nephew* 190). The Witch, who appears in subsequent novels as the White Witch, pays a heavy price for immortality and power. Death, therefore, is offered as something that is much better than living forever. Immortality is framed as evil, while death is something natural and good.

Harry Potter offers a similar figure who holds everlasting life but represents the symbol of evil throughout the series. Rowling borrows some ideas for her villain from the White Witch from *Narnia* to create Lord Voldemort. Both characters are extremely powerful, pale, and power-hungry, willing to do anything to retain or attain a ruling position. While Voldemort, like the White Witch, is a wizard, their means of achieving unnatural immortality are quite different. While the White Witch consumes the apple to gain her power, Voldemort must split himself, his soul, into pieces. This idea of loss instead of gain is important when discussing Voldemort's character because, while the Witch is powerful and still a force to fear, Voldemort's character is

made even more unnatural by this self-mutilation. In his fervor to escape death, Voldemort becomes something twisted and inhuman. In *Sorcerer's Stone*, Voldemort is even stranded without a body, forced to occupy Professor Quirrell's in order to stay alive. In the same novel, Firenze the Centaur remarks on the creature who is feeding on unicorn blood, who we later discover is Lord Voldemort, explaining that "'The blood of a unicorn will keep you alive, even if you are an inch from death, but at a terrible price. You have slain something pure and defenseless to save yourself, and you will have but a half-life, a cursed life, from the moment the blood touches your lips'" (*Sorcerer's Stone* 258). Voldemort is not only a being that is twisted and unnatural but is also one that is cursed because of his fervor to escape death.

As the reader discovers in the final two installments of the series, *The Half-Blood Prince* and *The Deathly Hallows*, Voldemort has gone to incredible lengths to elude death, and by attempting to reconstruct his identity, splitting his soul into pieces, or gaining the Elder Wand, Voldemort hopes to literally outsmart or overpower death itself. Virginia Zimmerman comments on this evasion of death in her article "Harry Potter and the Gift of Time," stating that "From the Sorcerer's Stone to Horcruxes, Voldemort prizes objects that offer the promise of his name—flight from death—and an evasion of time's power" (197). Here, she reinforces two major parts of Voldemort's desperation to elude death – attaining objects to control or manipulate time, postponing or evading death in that way, and also the significance of his name. If "Voldemort" itself means "flight from death," then his name takes on incredible meaning. Ultimately, what is wrong with Voldemort, much like the White Witch, is his desire to conquer death and gain unnatural power over it. However, it is important to note that this is very different from the power that the protagonists gain from their experiences with death. By having near-death

experiences or experiencing danger through the *fort-da* process, protagonists are able to "work through" their fears and anxieties about their mortality. The goal is not for the protagonists to vanquish death, but it is rather to repeat the unpleasurable experiences to gain mastery over the fears revolving around death. Thus, in *Harry Potter*, as in *Narnia*, the ultimate message is that death is good, or the right death is.

The message that these books relay to their readers is that death is not necessarily something to be feared. Death is portrayed as a natural, and even positive thing. By setting characters in situations of mortal peril, and by pitting them against villains who show a clear revulsion to death, the narrative allows readers to experience catharsis not only through the *fort-da* within the scenes, but also through addressing death on a larger scale. These scenes of *fort-da*, then, propel the movement of the plot to its ending where not only the protagonists themselves experience death first-hand (Wendy dies of old age, the Pevensie children die in a train accident, Harry "dies" when he is cursed with the *Avada Kadavra* spell in the final book), but the reader also experiences a death through the ending of the novel.[16] As Brooks explains,

> If repetition is mastery, movement from the passive to the active, and if mastery is an assertion of control over what man must in fact submit to – choice, we might say, of an imposed end – we have already a suggestive comment on the grammar of plot, where repetition, taking us back again over the same ground, could have to do with the choice of ends. (Brooks 98)

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[16] See chapter 3 pp. 58.

If we follow Brooks' thread here, then repetition allows the reader to follow the plot to the "correct" ending, where the most satisfying conclusion takes place. When this conclusion occurs, this is the point where the final *da* may occur, releasing the tension that the beginning of the novel creates. The novel, then, experiences a death itself, which is propelled by death within the action of the novel that eventually leads to the "correct" ending, or correct death. This ending is only achieved through the action of the middle of the plot, where anxieties posed in the beginning of the novel are worked through and mastered. When this mastery occurs, the protagonists may return to their realistic world and experience this "correct" ending.

While *Peter and Wendy* also reiterates the theme of death throughout its plot, the way in which death and mortality are conveyed is much different. As I have already discussed, the Darling children, as well as the Lost Boys, have dealt in death, killing pirates and facing near-death experiences. However, Wendy and Peter both display the fears and anxieties associated with growing up into adults. While Wendy embraces her mothering role in Neverland, Peter is anxious about his role in their make-believe scenario:

> Certainly he did not want a change, but he looked at her uncomfortably, blinking, you know, like one not sure whether he was awake or asleep.
>
> "Peter, what is it?"
>
> "I was just thinking," he said, a little scared. "It is only make believe, isn't it, that I'm their father?" (*Peter and Wendy* 130)

Peter's fear of growing up, and therefore his own mortality, shows a perhaps different view than the other examples. Peter is afraid to not only have the responsibilities of a grown-up, but it can also be argued that he is afraid of the inevitability of an end that comes with being an

adult. He is content to make-believe and experiment with being an adult, but in Neverland he never has to really grow up. Here, growing up, or death, is not necessarily a good thing – it has been shown that death is perhaps just another adventure, as Peter exclaims at the Mermaid's Lagoon, but the way in which mortality, growing up, is presented, it is not something that is "worked through" as in the other novels. Even after the children leave Neverland and grow up, Wendy "tried for his sake to not have growing pains," but she eventually becomes an adult and Peter "was no more to her than a little dust in the box in which she had kept her toys" (173). Wendy evidences hesitancy involved with growing up, which all centers around Peter's character. In these lines, the reader also witnesses the death of Wendy's childhood while the narration plunges forward, offering a consoling line that Wendy wanted to grow up. However, the novel does not end with the death of Wendy's childhood or even her character. The "cycle" of Peter taking her daughter and granddaughter with him to Neverland continues. Here, it is necessary to point out that Peter is not really the protagonist of the novel. His refusal to accept the final *da* of the novel, mortality, denies him that role. Therefore, Wendy's acceptance of her mortality and growing up situates her in the true protagonist role.

The repetition of death is meant to continue endlessly, the novel alluding to the idea that this cycle will continue as long as there are children. Death is depicted as something not to be feared, but something inevitable and not necessarily good or bad. The tone in this novel is significantly different. Death is treated as something unceremonious because it happens to adults, with Wendy's death not even being discussed as the novel ends. The ending rather privileges the child, offering childhood as something eternal, much like Peter Pan himself. For the child reader, this is a *fort-da* experience that perhaps echoes beyond the pages of the narrative. The evolution

from death in this novel goes from centering around danger and action to focusing on the inevitable mortality of all people, offering a way for readers to experiment with and work through different kinds of death, but remain consoled by the fact that they are still children like Peter is. By evolving the way that death is presented, the narrative offers a working-through of anxieties through *fort-da*. These sequences provide multiple opportunities for the protagonist, as well as the child reader, to work out those anxieties.

While death is presented in many different ways within these novels, its presence as a repeating theme is important to understanding the narrative. While characters may wield death, fight against an antagonist who becomes twisted by their obsession with the power over death, or experience death themselves, this repetition is entirely necessary for the reader to "play" with the idea of it. Brooks points out in his discussion of narrative theory that all plots follow a similar use of repetition because narrative "must ever present itself as a repetition of events that have already happened, and within this postulate of a generalized repetition it must make use of specific, perceptible repetitions in order to create plot, that is, to show us a significant interconnection of events" (Brooks 99). What Brooks is describing is the commonalities that *Peter and Wendy*, Narnia, and Harry Potter share. While the characters and presentation of these types of death are different, the running theme that underlies them all signals that "working through" is vital to the reading experience.

Chapter 3

Beginning with the End

Chapters one and two have dealt with two features of the narrative in *Peter and Wendy*, *Narnia*, and *Harry Potter*: beginnings and repetitions that propel the plot. Within each of these chapters, *fort-da* has played a vital part in understanding how the realistic and fantasy worlds are related, as well as conceptualizing reading as an attempt at mastery within the fantasy world. To discuss the final feature of narrative, I now turn my attention toward the endings of the novels. The endings, as I am discussing them, are spaces where the entire movement of the text finds a resolution. In these three novels, this is the point at which the protagonist exits the fantasy world and returns to their realistic world. For the child reader, the ending also means extricating themselves from the narrative at its conclusion, returning to their real world when the story ends. These returns connect the events of the beginning of the narrative to the ending, creating a frame around the narrative. However, this return is much more complicated than it seems, as I will evidence in the following discussion.

According to Brooks, the beginning of the plot presupposes the ending. In the fantasy novel, we can begin to understand this by looking at the structure of the story: the protagonists always return to their origins. Wendy returns to her mother and father, the Pevensie's return to the Professor's home, and Harry returns to the Muggle world. Gilead discusses this return as a circle or a frame around the fantasy world that brings the protagonist, as well as the reader, back to the realistic world of the story: "Often the ending completes a frame around the fantasy, reestablishing the fictional reality of the opening" (Gilead 277). Although what Gilead asserts here is often true, the return to the realistic world is often more complicated than the frame that

she suggests. For both *Narnia* and *Harry Potter*, two series in which a narrative strand is spread over many novels, the final ending differs from this concept of a neat and tidy frame around the narrative. In both of these series, the protagonists end their journeys within the fantasy world in their final novels instead of the realistic world. I will discuss how these series provide a complicated ending later in the chapter. Excluding the final installments of *Narnia* and *Harry Potter*, the fantasy novels in these series seem to follow the pattern that Gilead describes: the fantasy world must be left behind, and the rules of the realistic world must be reinstated before the novel can conclude. The beginning then presupposes this return – because the protagonist(s) leave, it is only logical that they must return in some way to their origins. Following this thread, if entering the fantasy world is a *fort*, then leaving this world is the inevitable *da* that is created.

As I have evidenced, the repetitions that occur in the fantasy space, or the *fort-da* sequences that demonstrate the reader's attempt at mastery over the anxieties or desires that they have in their real world, postpone the ending of the narrative. Brooks describes this movement as a tension that must be maintained to lead back to quiescence at the end of the novel, leading to the "right death, the correct end" (Brooks 103-104). More specifically, he details that "If repetition is mastery, movement from the passive to the active, and if mastery is an assertion of control over what man must in fact submit to – choice, we might say, of an imposed end – we have already a suggestive comment on the grammar of plot, where repetition, taking us back again over the same ground, could have to do with the choice of ends" (Brooks 98). Repetitions are therefore detours, where the novel has not yet found the correct ending and the reader, who experiences the action of the novel through the protagonist, is postponing the inevitable because they still need to gain mastery over the fantasy world. Both this repetition compulsion and the

desire for an ending (the death drive) serve the pleasure principle.[17] Ultimately, the process that the reader has been working through during the reading experience is leading toward quiescence – discharging unpleasure and gaining mastery over this unpleasure through *fort-da* (Brooks 107). For the protagonists, when this mastery is achieved, they then return to the realistic world – flying back to the nursery, tumbling out of the wardrobe, and stepping off the Hogwarts Express signal this mastery. Of course, this is putting the endings of the novels very simply because endings can be complicated by their inclusion in a series.

For example, in *The Last Battle*, part of the *Narnia* series, the protagonists are all able to live in the "real" Narnia that resembles heaven in Christian theology (*Battle* 210). The series ends with the promise that the characters are able to live on and be at peace within the fantasy world. As I will discuss later in this chapter, the return in this example is not necessarily to the realistic world, rather, it is a return in a more spiritual sense. In this series, Aslan is a god-like creature, meant to symbolize the Christian God. Therefore, this after-life ending is a return to something more primary – it is the return to true quiescence and to a place before hardship and strife. Similarly, Harry Potter defeats Voldemort in the wizarding world and is able to have a family and happy ending of his own where he is finally safe from the dark forces that plagued him his entire life. In this example, Harry dies and briefly encounters an afterlife at a dream-like King's Cross Station. Here, he must decide to move on or to return to his world, and he ultimately chooses to return. While not all series have the same implications as these two examples, what is notable is that, in these examples, the protagonists endure a literary death where they effectively die and reach an afterlife.

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[17] See *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, pp. 160.

For both *Narnia* and *Harry Potter*, "endings" are complicated by being a part of a series because there is not one ending – there are many. These endings can be considered part of a larger *fort-da* process, as I have described with narrative. The fact that there is more than one novel in each series shows that these endings are part of the repetition that eventually spirals out toward the end of the story. Ultimately, even the endings of each novel of the series display similar characteristics that signal an end, or the death of the novel. As I have discussed in chapter one, within the series each ending, or *da*, then leads into the next novel's *fort*, and the cycle continues until the final ending occurs.

It is important to consider this "death" of the novel not a desire for the reader themselves to die, but to rehearse an ending, or a return to the quiescence and release that occurs at the end of the novel. If at the beginning the reader enters the novel as a *fort* – a beginning of tension – then the narrative must lead to an ending, or *da*, a release of the tension started during the reading experience. Brooks continues to elucidate this complicated relationship for us, describing that the desire that resides in the text "is ultimately the desire for the end, for that recognition which is the movement of the death of the reader in the text" (Brooks 108). Roberta Trites also comments on this phenomenon, stating that "Thematically…repetitions imply that death is as inevitable as is the eventual ending of each narrative. Thus, death is embedded in the very discourse of such adolescent literature" (139).[18] I would argue here that the idea of an ending, not death, is embedded in children's literature. By viewing the reading experience through that of therapeutic repetition as Freud discusses in "Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through,"

[18] Although she specifies adolescent literature, for the purposes of this analysis the "adolescent" is also considered a child.

and if the child reader participates in self-therapy through the act of reading, then this ending, or "death" of the novel becomes a natural end to this therapy. Again, we must see the reader themselves not desiring death, rather the release that the end of the novel provides them. Their *role* as a reader within the text itself may die, providing catharsis. Death then becomes a structure to define the ending of the novel, rather than a literal death.

At the conclusion of *Peter and Wendy*, the Darling children, along with the Lost Boys, return to their home after their final showdown with the Neverland pirates (*Peter and Wendy* 167-169). Before the children can enter the nursery, however, the narrator shows us Mr. and Mrs. Darling who are still waiting for their children. The reader is given special privilege in this scene because they know something that the children do not: Mr. Darling is remorseful about his character before the children left. This change is significant – if he was the catalyst for the children's entrance to the fantasy world, then his improvement is something to note. Mr. Darling undergoes this character development because he is forced to reflect on his character when his children leave. This improvement is important because the children return to a changed home environment where the situations that they originally escaped from have improved. In this scene, the reader also becomes aware that Peter Pan tries to prevent the Darling children's return to the nursery. While Mr. and Mrs. Darling leave the window open for the children, Peter and Tinkerbell shut it so that "when Wendy comes she will think her mother has barred her out, and she will have to go back with [Peter]" (166). Peter's selfishness creates a tension (*fort*) where the reader can believe for a moment that the Darling children may not be able to return, picturing a crying Mrs. Darling who may never get her children back. To satisfy the *fort-da* of this scene, in a change of heart Peter unbars the window, allowing Wendy, John, and Michael to return to their

mother (*da*). This return to the realistic world establishes Mrs. and Mr. Darling in their parental roles and therefore the children's place in that world. Unlike the other children, Peter Pan rejects this system of power[19] and refuses to stay, despite Mrs. Darling offering him a place in their home with the other children (170-171). This is Peter's rejection of the return, as well as the rejection of an ending. By refusing to participate in the finality of growing up and death, Peter denies the return to origins in England. However, this return to the realistic world does not mean the end of adventures in Neverland for Wendy. The following chapter, almost as an afterthought, shows that Wendy is able to return to Neverland, complicating the *fort-da* of the ending.

The following scenes complicate the *fort-da* in these final scenes because even after the return from the fantasy world, Wendy is able to go back to Neverland with Peter two more times. Because he rejects the realistic world, Peter becomes a being of the fantasy world, only returning before spring-cleaning every year to take Wendy to Neverland with him. These trips to Neverland are further postponements to the ending of the novel because, as I will discuss later in this analysis, the narrative must have a "correct" ending. In her first return with Peter, Wendy finds that he has forgotten about their adventures, as well as his nemesis Captain Hook and even Tinkerbell (172). She is only able to return to Neverland once more after this, as she realizes that Peter's concept of time is much different than in the realistic world. Peter does not see "girl Wendy" again because he does not realize that so much time is passing. Because the fantasy world operates under a different structure of power than the realistic world – power that is ultimately controlled by Peter and his ability to "make-believe" – Peter and Wendy's relationship becomes impossible. While Wendy tried to wait for Peter to return, in the end "she grew up of

[19] See Ch. 1 pp. 14-15.

her own free will a day quicker than other girls" (173). The narrator intrudes for a moment at this point in the narrative, encouraging the reader not to feel sorry for Wendy because she decided to grow up and no longer postpone adulthood through her adventures in Neverland. However, when Peter returns, one can't help but note that the tone of the last scene resonates as wistful or tragic.

When Peter returns to the Darling home after a long absence to take Wendy back to Neverland, he finds the adult Wendy, who "[squeezed] herself as small as possible. Something inside her was crying 'Woman, Woman, let go of me'" (176). As her daughter Jane leaves with Peter, Wendy wishes that she could go back to Neverland with them, but as Jane points out, she can't fly anymore (178). Certainly, this feels like a loss or a tragedy that Wendy can no longer go to Neverland with Peter, but ending in tragedy is not uncommon in fantasy, as Gilead points out. She describes that in some fantasy novels "the return turns against fantasy but…acts in a tragic mode that reveals, without an assuring sense of mediation, both the seductive force and the dangerous potentiality of fantasy" (Gilead 278). An argument can be made that Wendy was seduced by Neverland, and when she is unable to go there, it is obvious that there is a longing for that world. What is also evident about this ending is that Wendy's mortality, a looming threat since her return to Neverland, is alluded to in the final pages of the novel. The narrator describes that "As you look at Wendy you may see her hair becoming white, and her figure little again, for all this happened long ago" (178). This mortality is referenced before Wendy's implied death as well. The narrator tells the reader that Mrs. Darling had died many years before Peter came back to see Wendy: "Mrs. Darling was now dead and forgotten" (*Peter and Wendy* 174). This bald statement by the narrator only further emphasizes the reality of death that Wendy faces, but also emphasizes memory as well: Mrs. Darling is not only dead, but she has been *forgotten*. This is

consistent with how Peter quickly forgets everyone from the realistic world, even Wendy; however, the narrator's use of it here is interesting. Do we take this as yet again another threat that mortality provides – the fleetingness of life – or is it simply a realistic fact? Either way, the narrator's contribution here only emphasizes the changes that Wendy has gone through herself and also thrusts the narrative into motion towards its conclusion.

It does not come as a surprise that Wendy ages, because everyone does, but what is evident is that, while the ending of the novel represents a death of the narrative, we also effectively witness Wendy's death as well. The beginning of the novel makes the reality of growing up very clear to the reader: "All children, except one, grow up" (55). This statement in effect presupposes this ending for Wendy and the other children. They had to grow up in order to provide the closure that the beginning promises. The children will grow old and no longer be children. But that does not change that this ending rings as tragic for Wendy, as well as for Michael, John, and the Lost Boys.[20] Perhaps this "tragedy" is present because it is another avenue of catharsis for the child reader. The child knows that growing up is an eventuality, but they do not have to experience it yet. They are still children, therefore reading this novel and exiting the reading experience with the final *da* is the comfort that they do not have to grow up just yet. On the other hand, catharsis through the *da* of the ending could also come from the realization that Peter and Neverland live on "so long as children are gay and innocent and heartless" (178). This is where reader and protagonist identification become complicated and therefore make the tragedy of the ending ambiguous. What I would like to point out here is that

[20] The narrator tells the reader that the Lost Boys have grown up and are "done for by this time; so it is scarcely worth saying more about them" (173). The following sentences are a brief summary of their ordinary adult lives and is clear that they are no longer "interesting" or relevant to the plot.

although what the reader takes away from this ending is not entirely clear, and can arguably vary from reader to reader, what is important is the final *da* that is experienced. For the narrative to be complete, this is the way that the novel must end– Wendy *must* die, and Peter *must* live on – because the "desire of the text is ultimately the desire for the end, for that recognition which is the movement of the death of the reader in the text" (Brooks 108). Because the child reader creates their own meaning through the text, no matter their interpretation of the ending, this final scene is still the "correct" ending. When the reader finishes the novel with whatever meaning they feel that it holds, this becomes the "correct end" that leads to catharsis, allowing them to experience the death of their role as a reader in the reading experience.

Another complication to this argument of a tragic ending is whether the ending truly is tragic or not. Here, we must also consider what Jacqueline Rose describes as the impossible relation between adult and child that children's literature poses (Rose 1). When discussing the tragedy of the ending, this relationship between adult and child is crucial to understanding the child's reading experience at the end of the novel. Viewing the ending as tragic may be only imposed upon the texts by adults because, arguably, adults are more focused on mortality than a child. Despite the uncertainty of how the child may actually relate to literary deaths during this ending, leaving the reading experience for the reader becomes a death for their role in the text, allowing the *fort-da* sequence to end. This ending, despite the ambiguity of how the child perceives death, provides the catharsis from allowing the right death to occur: Wendy dies because she belongs in the realistic world, but Peter will be a constant, just like Neverland. This relieves some of the perceived anxieties of the ending – it is not tragic because it is natural and

reassuring, providing the catharsis that comes with the mastery over fears surrounding death for the child reader.

Narnia offers a similar notion of a constant force outside the realm of the realistic in its ending. The series follows the land of Narnia from birth to destruction, which is important in itself. If narration is a play with stresses and tensions that eventually lead to a death, signifying life, then in a similar way Narnia represents the same cycle. When the reader encounters the Pevensie children, Narnia is aging at a much different rate than the realistic world, as can be evidenced by the exits from the fantasy world. In *Wardrobe*, *Caspian*, and *Dawn Treader*; the children return to the realistic world at the same time that they had left. This has many implications, but for the land of Narnia itself we can draw a parallel to Neverland. While Narnia is governed by a similar law as the realistic world, it shares with Neverland the element of manipulated time. While time operates differently in these novels, by being in the fantasy world the reality of growing up in the realistic world can be postponed – the protagonists do not have to face the reality of their aging because the children return to the realistic world at the same age when they entered. From this, the *fort-da* of aging and growing up can be further reflected on. The tension, or *fort*, that growing up causes (although not implicitly stated as in *Peter and Wendy*, we can treat this as a universal issue among children) is then relieved by the *da*, or the "play" with time that is exercised in the fantasy world. The child reader can effectively play with the idea of growing older without actually aging.

In *Wardrobe*, the temporality of Narnia and this play with time is striking to not only the reader but also the protagonists themselves. The ending of the novel shows the reader a Narnia in which peace has been attained over many years, to the credit of the Pevensie children's rule over

the land. The narrator comments that, during this time where they grow up to become adults in the fantasy world, they "lived in great joy and if ever they remembered their life in [the realistic] world it was only as one remembers a dream" (*Wardrobe* 184). The children (now adults) even forget about the lamppost that signals that the wardrobe is not far beyond them, rather identifying it as something that was "'as it were in a dream, or in the dream of a dream'" (186). Their forgetfulness of the realistic world ultimately causes them to return to it. This journey past the lamppost, through thickets, and past coats offers a look at the gradual return to the realistic world, but the reader only sees a sudden change in the Pevensie children when they exit the wardrobe:

> the next moment they all came tumbling out of a wardrobe door into the empty room, and they were no linger Kings and Queens in their hunting array but just Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy in their old clothes. It was the same day and the same hour of the day on which they had all gone into the wardrobe to hide. Mrs. Macready and the visitors were still talking in the passage. (187)

The Kings and Queens of Narnia no longer exist after this return to the realistic world – the Pevensie children are their realistic world selves again, down to the clothes they had left in. The children were able to grow up in Narnia, becoming leaders and role models, only to return to their childhood once more. This return, or *da*, enables the child reader to experience alongside the protagonists the play with time. While many years passed in Narnia where the children were able to experience a life with power, responsibility, and the potential for sexuality, they are ultimately relieved of this burden when they are children once again and do not have to actually face these problems when they return from the fantasy world. It is important to note here that,

unlike their forgetfulness of the realistic world, the children are not as quick to forget Narnia. As Sally Rigsby points out, “The [protagonists] return to the world of reality having achieved a new stage in development, a new status, and a new perspective on life. Their selfhood is enriched, for the memories of their experiences in the fantasy places undergird their belief in the value of the imagination and in the importance of the intangible, spiritual dimensions of human existence” (Rigsby 10). While Rigsby is discussing only the female protagonists of Lucy from *Narnia* and Irene from *The Princess and the Goblin*, it is surely true for the other protagonists in *Narnia* as well. Their experience resonates with them, and also foreshadows their future excursions into the land of Narnia.

While not as evident in the other novels of the series, the children always return to the realistic world at the very moment they left. The Pevensie children all return to the realistic world before their train arrives in *Prince Caspian* (albeit without Edmund’s flashlight) and Lucy, Edmund, and Eustace are standing in front of the painting once again in *Dawn Treader*. This play, or experimentation, that temporal manipulation affords the protagonists in the fantasy world offers a chance to postpone the inevitability of aging. Like *Peter and Wendy*, *Narnia* offers a world where the rules of time don’t seem to apply. The fantasy world then further becomes a place of play without the rules that govern both the realistic and real worlds.

The beginning of the novels within the series presuppose the ending because the children are brought to Narnia on each occasion when they are called upon or needed, and then leave when Narnia is either at peace or on the path to peace. However, the final novel in the series complicates this pattern of a return to the realistic world because the children do not leave when they come to Narnia at the end of the series. *The Last Battle* offers a finality to the series that

calls back to the origins of Narnia and the series itself. As the chronological beginning to the series, *The Magician's Nephew* follows the story of Digory, Polly, and the White Witch, who witness Narnia's creation. This creation story of Narnia is referenced in *The Last Battle* through not only Digory and Polly's presence, as they were there when Aslan spoke the world into existence and when he commanded the world to end, but also through the pattern that they created when Digory committed the first offense to Narnia – bringing the White Witch (*Nephew* 126, *Battle* 170). To fix this initial sin, Aslan explains that "'…as Adam's race has done the harm, Adam's race shall help to heal it'" (*Nephew* 148). Therefore, this beginning that the story of Digory and Polly are involved in presupposes this eventual ending with the Pevensie children. The Pevensie's found Narnia because Digory (later referenced as the Professor) created the wardrobe out of a tree grown from a fruit of Narnia. They had to vanquish the White Witch and help Narnia throughout the series because of Digory's mistake. The end of Narnia then becomes a culmination of the events started by Digory and Polly in *The Magician's Nephew.*

As previously noted, in chronological order the series begins with *The Magician's Nephew*. While this installment was published a year before *The Last Battle* – the final novel in the series – it was published after the books following the Pevensie children. This changes the way in which children would have read the series when it was published in the 1950s versus a child reader today. This seems to complicate the way in which the beginning presupposes the ending of the series. For child readers at the time of publication, it first appears that the order in which the books were read would have surely affected the *fort-da* of reading. However, the explanations which *The Magician's Nephew* provides for the history of Narnia presuppose the ending of the series', or the realistic world's, timeline. Therefore, the order in which the series is

read does not entirely matter, excepting that *The Magician's Nephew* is read before *The Last Battle*, in turn allowing this history of Narnia to come full circle through its destruction in the final novel.

The final scenes within *The Last Battle* allow the Pevensie children, as well as Digory and Polly, to return to Narnia as young adults and not simply children. The concept of aging is even complicated within the scene where the old Kings and Queens of Narnia return. Tirian observes that Jill "looked older, but then didn't, and he could never make up his mind on that point" (*Battle* 152). Digory and Polly are also transformed into youthful versions of themselves rather than the older figures that they were portrayed as in the realistic world of the novel. The concept of age is meditated on in this same scene in which the Kings and Queens return. Tirian observes that Susan is not among the Pevensie's, to which Peter replies "'My sister Susan,' answered Peter shortly and gravely, 'is no longer a friend of Narnia'" (154). Polly adds to this mystery surrounding Susan's absence, describing Susan's behavior as silly because she wanted to be grown up but only wants to have fun and stay that age. Because Susan wanted to leave behind Narnia and childhood, she was not with her siblings when they were on the train and therefore could not come to Narnia with them. This exclusion of one of the Pevensie children is significant because Susan chooses adulthood and therefore is not able to achieve the quiescence that the real Narnia provides the others. The fact that Susan chose to forget Narnia and reject its reality represents not only the rejection of religion (based on C.S. Lewis's larger Christian message), but also a rejection of childhood itself. By refusing to believe in Narnia, she loses the capability to return.

Much like the beginning of the Pevensie children's adventures in *Narnia*, the ending also features a door, or threshold, through which the Pevensie children enter from the realistic world after a train accident. After recounting their experience on their side of the door, Aslan appears and ushers them back into Narnia, saying "'Now it is time…TIME'" (170). In the following chapter, Aslan destroys Narnia and holds a reckoning for the residents of Narnia: "All the creatures who looked at Aslan [with hatred] swerved to their right, his left, and disappeared into his huge black shadow, which…streamed away to the left of the doorway" (175). Those who looked at Aslan with love were able to walk through the door and enter the "real Narnia" where the Kings and Queens of Narnia then go after they witness the destruction of Narnia. These events all culminate to the point when the Kings and Queens are able to go through the Door and leave the emptiness that was Narnia behind.

This tension (*fort*) is released when the protagonists realize where they are: the "real" Narnia that acts as a heaven-like landscape. The Pevensie children (excepting Susan), Eustace and Jill, and Polly and Digory all are allowed to remain in the "real" Narnia because it is a return to quiescence. Excepting Eustace and Jill, the protagonists perished in the train accident and were able to enter a heaven-like state. It is notable here that this death is not at all tragic – in fact, their death is not meditated on at all. Rather, the focus on an after-life in Narnia is at the center of their conversation with Aslan (210). The narrator interjects at the end of the narrative to leave the reader with some final sentiments on the ending of the series:

> And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page:

> now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before. (210-211)

Arguably there is no tragedy through death in this ending. The narrator makes it clear that there is no ending to the story even though both the world of Narnia itself as well as the protagonists die. This series ends with a literal death, much like Peter and Wendy; however, Narnia demonstrates an afterlife that offers a heaven-like quiescence.[21] As Deborah O'Keefe describes, this series tells " the whole life story of the land of Narnia – creation to destruction – from Lewis's Christian perspective" (O'Keefe 168). This ending, fitting with the Christian tradition of a blissful afterlife, is also fitting with Brooks' theory. According to Brooks, this is exactly what the ending should offer the reader – it should satisfy the death drive and the pleasure principle. The desire for death within this narrative is certainly satisfied. The fantasy world comes to an end, as does the realistic world (at least for the protagonists). These worlds must ultimately die in order to give birth to a world that is the embodiment of pleasure, therefore satisfying the death drive. Along with this fulfillment of the death drive comes a return to origins. The Pevensies must leave the realistic world because it was their fate to become Kings and Queens of Narnia, so therefore this future is inescapable and must be returned to. Therefore, ending in their rightful states as Kings and Queens is fitting in the "correct" ending of the narrative and is consistent with Lewis's larger message of faith. This final *da* for the characters becomes death along with life everlasting, and much like Peter in Neverland, this ending could

[21] This heaven-like imagery can be traced to Lewis's own religious beliefs and his inclusion of religious themes into many of his works. C.S. Lewis, although an atheist in his 20s, converted to Christianity in 1931. His religious beliefs were the basis of many of his works, and surely Narnia is no exception to this.

offer the child reader a comforting ending, as death is portrayed as a good thing because it leads to eternal life.

While *Harry Potter* is a series much like *Narnia*, it differs in some significant ways, as I have evidenced in my previous chapters. Because of the structure of the worlds in *Harry Potter*, the repetitions within the novels, such as Harry's continual encounters with Lord Voldemort and his return to the Dursley's at the end of every school year, are present in almost every novel.[22] These endings that show a return to the Muggle world provide a frame around each narrative and string them together. At the end of *Sorcerer's Stone*, for example, Harry leaves his friends with the promise that he will see them over the summer holiday or when the next school year begins (308-309). With this narrative frame, the beginning inherently presupposes the ending: Harry leaves the Dursley's home at the end of each summer but must ultimately return. In the final novel, *The Deathly Hallows*, this rule does not apply. Instead, Harry knows that he must never return to the Dursley's because the charm protecting him when he is underage breaks on his seventeenth birthday, putting him in danger if he continues to live there (30-33). Yet *The Deathly Hallows* also contains themes or elements that harken back to the beginning of the series and demonstrates how the beginning supposes the ending. These moments, where certain elements that are introduced in the first book and then recur repeatedly throughout the series such as the Golden Snitch that Harry catches in his first Quidditch tournament, the bond between Harry and Voldemort's wands, Griphook the goblin, and dragons at Gringotts (*Sorcerer's Stone* 191, 85,

[22] *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, and arguably *The Half Blood Prince*, are the only novels where Harry does not encounter Lord Voldemort in person. *The Deathly Hallows* also breaks this pattern because Harry does not face Voldemort at the end of the school year.

71, 64), are notable because they showcase the larger frame around the narrative of the series where a return to origins becomes central to the battle between good and evil, Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort. For example, the Golden Snitch that Harry catches in the first novel, almost choking on the small golden ball, emerges again in the final book (*Sorcerer's Stone* 191). When Dumbledore leaves Harry the Snitch in his will, it is revealed that it holds the inscription "I open at the close" (*Hallows* 134). Harry is only able to open the Snitch when he is about to face Voldemort, alone and vulnerable. Here, he discovers that it contains the Resurrection Stone: "The black stone with it's jagged crack running down the center sat at the two halves of the Snitch." (698). With this stone, Harry is able to call back his deceased loved ones, connecting this moment, where he is about to face death, with his origins – his parents and family, as well as his first experiences at Hogwarts. Virginia Zimmerman also comments on this scene, stating that "For [Voldemort], the stone is only a Horcrux, an object meant to defeat time. For Harry, who ultimately uses it to surround himself with his lost loved ones, the stone makes an ally of time" (Zimmerman 197). Harry's reverence for his past ties his perceived end, then, directly to his origins.

Perhaps the most notable element within the series is the looming threat of Lord Voldemort and his vendetta against Harry, the boy who lived. In *Sorcerer's Stone*, the novel opens to Dumbledore discussing with McGonagall that Voldemort "'tried to kill the Potter's son, Harry. But – he couldn't. He couldn't kill that little boy. No one knows why, or how, but they're saying that when he couldn't kill Harry Potter, Voldemort's power somehow broke – and that's why he's gone'" (12). What the reader soon learns, however, is that Voldemort is not dead and returns to Hogwarts in an attempt to regain his strength by possessing the Sorcerer's Stone.

Harry and his friends are able to stop him and postpone his return to power, but not without Harry having to face the wizard who killed his parents: "Harry would have screamed, but he couldn't make a sound. Where there should have been a back to Quirrell's head, there was a face, the most terrible face Harry had ever seen. It was chalk white with glaring red eyes and slits for nostrils, like a snake" (293). This horrifying encounter is repeated throughout most of the novels in the series, with Voldemort eventually rising to power in (somewhat) human form in *The Goblet of Fire* (*Goblet* 638). These encounters with Voldemort at the Mirror of Erised, the Chamber of Secrets, the graveyard during the Quidditch cup, and the Department of Mysteries, show a repetition that spirals out toward the final resolution, or the ending of the narrative (*Sorcerer's Stone* 288, *Chamber* 389, *Goblet* 638, *Order* 812). Ultimately, Harry's fate is to face Voldemort, and that fate is realized when Harry returns from near-death in the Kings Cross scene.

In a pure white and dream-like version of King's Cross station, where, in the realistic world, Harry went each year to board the train to Hogwarts, Harry and Dumbledore discuss Voldemort. This conversation echoes the first novel, where Dumbledore and Harry discuss Harry's second encounter with Voldemort (*Sorcerer's Stone* 298-299). In both scenes, Dumbledore guides Harry through what transpired, offering answers and speculations about his relationship with Voldemort. The train station not only references the repetitive entrances that Harry traverses to the wizarding world throughout the series, but it also represents a space between life and death, where Harry goes and experiences a sort of death that he ultimately returns from. Roberta Trites meditates on the concept of death in the adolescent novel, where she describes the encounters with death that are prolific within these novels: "Understanding [death]

leads adolescent characters into a loss of innocence that seems, at least initially, tragic...When they overcome their tragic vulnerability and avert catastrophe, transforming the tragedy of their own mortality into at least some kind of some level of triumph, they experience a heightened awareness of what power they do and do not hold in their lives" (Trites 121). While it can be argued that Harry understands death earlier in the series when he sees Cedric Digory die and has near-death experiences himself many times at Hogwarts, including his encounters with Voldemort, but also his brushes with magical creatures like Aragog, trolls, and the basilisk, it is only in this scene at King's Cross that he faces death directly. Harry is cursed with *Avada Kedavara*, which would normally mean instant death to anyone it is cast upon; therefore, he suffers an (almost) literal death. The liminal space of King's Cross represents Harry's direct contact with what it would be like to die – something he has never experienced before.

Harry seems to fully understand his mortality and the power that it affords him when he is told by Dumbledore that he has the power to return to the land of the living and face Voldemort for the final time, or he may choose to go "on": "Leaving this place would not be nearly as hard as walking into the forest had been, but it was warm and light and peaceful here, and he knew that he was heading back to pain and the fear of more loss" (722). Here, Harry must decide to move "on" as Dumbledore describes, or to return to his fate. This conversation allows Harry to not only decide to return, but also to free himself from the Horcrux that Voldemort had left inside him. He realizes that he can defeat Voldemort, and that he does hold that power where before he was hopeless. Harry is still afraid of what he may face, but, as Trites points out: "Both acceptance and awareness serve in the power/knowledge dynamic to render the adolescent both powerless in her fear of death and empowered by acknowledging its power" (119). While Harry

is not technically dead in this scene, his existence at King's Cross complicates the death of the novel. At first glance, it may seem that Harry's presence in this in-between state is much like that of the real Narnia, where it is peaceful and without conflict. However, this ending would not be the "correct" ending for Harry. It is yet another detour before the ending because the narrative has not achieved the proper ending – mastery through repetition in the narrative has not been completed. Recalling Brooks, the goal of the narrative is to discharge unpleasure and gain mastery over it through *fort-da*. If the novel ended at the King's Cross scene, then this would not happen.

Harry must leave King's Cross and go back to the wizarding world to defeat Voldemort, as the Horcruxes are finally destroyed (excepting Nagini) and Voldemort is weakened. Because Harry gains insight and wisdom from Dumbledore in this transitory space of King's Cross, Harry is very aware that he has been given a chance to defeat the evil that scarred him as a child and took away his family. In this final battle, Harry's return to origins is found in the very thing that separated him from them. Despite the tension that is built throughout the series, the final duel between Harry and Voldemort is short, boiling down to a split second where Voldemort's curse rebounds and kills him instead of Harry:

> Harry saw Voldemort's green jet meet his own spell, saw the Elder Wand fly high, dark against the sunrise, spinning across the enchanted ceiling like the head of Nagini, spinning through the air toward the master it would not kill, who had come to take full possession of it at last. And Harry, with the unerring skill of the Seeker, caught the wand in his free hand as Voldemort fell backward, arms splayed, the slit pupils of the scarlet eyes rolling upward. Tom Riddle hit the floor with a mundane finality, his body feeble

and shrunken, the white hands empty, the snakelike face vacant and unknowing. (743-744)

The length of this engagement between the two characters representing good and evil is interesting in this moment. A major tension (*fort*) within the series is finally resolved (*da*) within a few meager lines that were prefaced by the 4,209 pages of the series leading up to this moment. Kerrie Le Leivre points this out, writing that "the series' major narrative strand represents the closing movement of the long conflict" (Le Lievre 25). What she observes is consistent within the larger *fort-da* narrative – the ending of the narrative, and Harry's death as a character, should take place here, after his conquest over Lord Voldemort. The narrative strand has been ended and Voldemort has been defeated. However, this is not the end for Harry. Much like the final chapter of *Peter and Wendy*, the epilogue of the novel complicates the ending for Harry, Ron, and Hermione because it provides a look at the protagonists when they have grown up.

In this epilogue, the reader encounters an adult Harry who is once again at Kings Cross Station.[23] This is a sudden, if not jarring change from the character that readers were able to follow in the series, and who gradually grew up over the course of seven novels. Although Harry is considered "of age" in the wizarding world at the conclusion of the seventh novel, in the epilogue he has become a husband and parent. This offers an interesting look at Harry, because, like Wendy, his aging complicates the *fort-da* and correct end of the novel. However, unlike Wendy, this ending is not tragic. In fact, the last lines of the novel assure the reader that "All is well." This epilogue functions as, instead of another *fort-da* sequence, an extended *da* from the

[23] Although *The Cursed Child* also features an adult Harry and continues the story, I am rejecting that as canon for the purposes of my analysis, much like other scholars have done since its release

original ending of the narrative. This extended *da* movement also contributes to what at first seems a major flaw in this ending within the *fort-da* process: it seems that Harry never returns to the realistic world. The wainscot structure[24] of the two worlds makes this return obsolete because the fantasy and realistic worlds are blended and overlap one another. However, if Harry's return to origins is considered, then his residence within the fantasy *and* realistic worlds as an adult makes sense. Harry is at once native to the wizarding world and to the realistic world, therefore an ending where he is at a threshold between them makes sense. King's Cross acts as an in-between, a blending of the two worlds that Harry himself represents. This liminal space that Harry occupies in the epilogue contributes to the final *da* of the novel, the release for the reader being that the two worlds are at peace and Harry has finally found his place within them.

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[24] See Chapter 1 pp. 27.

Conclusion

I was 10 years old when the final installment in the *Harry Potter* series was released, and I vividly remember taking home *The Deathly Hallows*, opening to the first page, and finishing the entire 784-page novel in less than three days. I remember crying when Dobby is murdered, feeling elated when Harry survives the *Avada Kadavara* curse for the second time, and finally enjoying a sense of sadness and contentedness from the epilogue of the story – good triumphed over evil, Harry and his friends were happy, all was well. How is it that I can vividly recall how this novel made me feel, over 10 years later? Based on my analysis throughout this thesis, the answer is that, for the child reader, this grief, fear, and elation are very real. This exemplifies the claims that I've been making – that child readers feel alongside the child protagonists of these novels.

As a public-school teacher, I am constantly reminded that these experiences that children have with the novel are largely universal. Working with children and adolescents, it is easy to observe this close relationship occurring over and over again – my emotional reaction to Dobby's death in *The Deathly Hallows* is not unique. In many avid readers that I have taught, I have seen this intimacy between reader and the novel firsthand – they will be discussing with their peers how this book made them cry, or that book's ending was so satisfying. What is happening here is that the children are making connections, building empathy, and relating to the characters. Why else would they have such strong emotions about someone who is not even real? They have forged a connection with the characters in the novel that is so deep that they feel as the characters feel. They are effectively experiencing the same tensions, reliefs, joys, and anguish that the protagonists encounter. In my own experience, for example, my grief for Dobby

was real grief and provided an opportunity to practice mourning the loss of a loved one. This displays what I have evidenced through my analysis: the reader experiences the *fort-da* sequence alongside the protagonist when they enter the imaginary world of the novel. Throughout the narrative, the protagonist, and therefore the reader, "play" with the action of the novel, repeating the *fort-da* process that spirals out to the correct ending. This ending, of course, is the ending that provides the most relief.

This ending may only come when the protagonist has learned something about themselves or the world around them – Wendy learns that she is not ready to be a mother just yet and values her own mother much more because of that; the Pevensie children sort out their differences and bond in Narnia; and Harry finds a place where he belongs at Hogwarts. These returns do not necessarily resolve all the protagonists' problems and anxieties; however, their journeys display a working out and through these issues. The return becomes less important than the journey in this way – the dilatory space[25], or *fort*, becomes the space where tension is suspended and where these anxieties can be explored. The child reader's experience in reading can be viewed in much the same way – the journey, rather than the ending (and therefore their exit from the imaginary world of the novel), can be viewed as what was important to their "therapy" through reading. I had a student tell me that she was so upset that her book ended that she cried for an hour, grieving not a lost character but her own exit from the world of the book. The book ended in such a way that it provided the ultimate *da*, or moment of catharsis. What this student experienced is not unique, though it may seem extreme to some. She identified so strongly with the characters that she seems to have lost herself within them: this is what is so

[25] Place of suspense; see Brooks pp. 18.

important about the fantasy novel. The reader must return to problems in the real world – she must always leave the imaginary world and face her troubles. However, by experimenting and working through anxieties via the protagonist within the novel, she is better equipped to face those anxieties again.

This is what is so imperative about reading, especially for children and adolescents. Reading opens so many doors to them – it opens a whole new world of possibilities and places to explore. And much like the landscapes of fiction, the real world is open to countless possibilities for children as well. As Francis Spufford describes in his memoir *The Child that Books Built: A Life in Reading*, "…in every novel there are reverses, that all plots twist and turn, that sadness and happiness are just the materials authors use, in arrangements I know very well…the true story of my life looks no different; it is just a story among stories, and after I have been reading for a while, I can hardly tell anymore which is my own" (210). Narrative imitates life, just as Spufford describes here, but it does even more than that. Reading narratives give children the chance to experiment with emotions such as grief, fear, and joy, things that they will inevitably experience as they grow up. Children learn from the reading experience – I learned about the grief that accompanies death from Dobby and was able to use this knowledge when I encountered death more personally later in life. By reading to understand my own world, I was able to become better equipped as a child to handle issues in my adolescence and beyond.

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