Discuss the otherness of the child with reference to at least two texts.

While Clement Ball argues that Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*[1] represents 'a radical break in the history of literature for children'[2], it also holds much in common with J.M Barrie's earlier text, *Peter and Wendy*[3]. Different models of the child are embodied in the two, arguably the unconscious child and the innocent child respectively, representing their corresponding epoch's construction of the child. Yet the otherness of the child - its fundamental difference and subservience to the adult - remains apparent in both works, as children are constantly compared to and regarded from the point of view of the adult.

In parallel portal fantasy narratives, the children of both texts journey to and from the adult world to a spatiotemporally 'other' island of fantastical child freedom - Neverland and 'the place where the wild things are'. This topology bifurcates adult and child, in its cyclicity establishing the adult world as the dominant realm. Through this dualistic structure, the child only gains meaning by its comparison to the adult. Essentially, the child is seen as other due to its non-adultness.

In *Wild Things*, the domestic adult realm is set against a wild child land. Max's journey is initiated by his Mother's punishment for bad, 'wild' behaviour – Max, in his iconic

[1] Maurice Sendak, *Where the Wild Things Are* (London: Red Fox, 2013). All further references are to this edition.
[2] John Clement Ball, 'Max's Colonial Fantasy: Rereading Sendak's "Where the Wild Things Are"', *Ariel*, 28.1 (1997), 167-179 (p. 167).
[3] J.M. Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2007). All further references are to this edition.

wolf suit (with its fairy-tale connotations of wicked otherness), chases his dog with a fork and threatens to eat his mother up. Domestic archetypes (a fork and eating) are warped into an animalistic, primal wildness, signalling Max's undeveloped social manners. Fittingly, Max is 'sent to bed without eating anything', reinforcing his exclusion from the domestic realm. Max flees this hegemony; household objects are replaced by untamed wilderness as his bedroom fantastically transforms into a forest - 'his ceiling hung with vines/ and the walls became the world around'. The confining walls of the bedroom are transcended, much like the flight of the children out of their nursery window in *Peter and Wendy*, and Max sails to the island. Teddy bears are exchanged for 'wild things'. In echo, the strict lines of the illustrations diminish and the images seep into their white borders, eventually filling the entire page at the height of Max's wildness. Borders are crossed - most notably the one between adult and child worlds.

Similarly in *Peter and Wendy*, the children leave the adult, domestic London home for the wild Neverland. 'Second star to the right and straight on till morning' (p. 45), is famously the way there. It's abstract location is so far-removed from the adult-dominated mainland that it doesn't even conform to rational, adult ways of mapping. While there may be adults on this island, they are notably juvenile, as if plucked out of a child's role-play. Indeed, Hook's foppishness emphasises such performativity. He is trapped in a public-school-boy tradition of 'good form'; the narrator remarks that such customs 'still clung to him like garments'(p. 137). Juxtaposed against the strict rules of the mainland is a romanticised autonomous boyhood fantasy of fighting pirates, roaming free and adventuring. The children of both texts are spatially othered, adult and child realms set in Manichean opposition.

Correspondingly, the respective child islands are temporally other. There is a tension in *Wild Things* between the child's subjective perception of time and the adults objective one. At the end of the book, Max 'found his supper waiting for him', as if it is the same night upon which he was sent to bed without supper. But for Max, years (at least) have passed. From the child's perspective, time is stretched and expanded, perhaps disappearing altogether for an interval. Max, upon leaving home, 'sailed off through night and day/ and in and out of weeks/ and almost over a year/ to where the wild things are'. Time here is physically tangible - Max moves 'through', 'in and out' and 'over' time as if it were the sea and the waves he sails on his boat, this spatial interaction revealing time's transformability for him. Once on the island, time seems to disappear, its prelapsarian nature preceding a temporal awareness. Critics have described this movement back in time, or to a 'pre-time', as colonial in nature, comparing it to Marlow's journey up the Congo which is 'like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world'[4]. Discourses around racial others tend to locate them 'in an earlier historical or evolutionary time, or outside of time altogether'[5]. But like typical racist colonial comparisons of natives to children, a racialised temporality strikes a parallel with the child's time-subjectivity. The child's relationship to time is pre-social, other to adult temporality.

In *Peter and Wendy*, time is more of a spectacle. The text opens, 'All children, except one, grow up.' (p. 9), and henceforth growing up (or not growing up) and temporality are at the forefront of Barrie's perception of the child experience. Mrs Darling cries to two-year-old Wendy, '''Oh, why can't you remain like this forever!''' (p. 9) in a sensational plea to halt time, mourning the transience of childhood. In both Neverland, a space of alternate time, and Peter Pan, the eternal child negated from time, does such an adult entreaty materialize. The

[4] Ball, p. 169.
[5] Ibid.

narrator notes that 'it is quite impossible to say how time does wear on in Neverland, where it is calculated by moons and suns, and there are ever so many more of them than on the mainland' (p. 81). 'Calculating' time in an empirical, rational (stereotypically adult) sense doesn't conform to the temporal ways of Neverland. The children remain in a timeless state; they do not belong to the past (hence their constant forgetting of parents) or to futurity (in their initial refusal to fly home and grow up). Thus, Barrie suggests, are children more present than adults. However, unlike the complete absence of time on Max's island, the echoes of adult time systems (the ticking crocodile clock) persist in Neverland, encroaching on the child-space. The clock is a particular terror to Hook, suggesting an adult fear of time's movement (much like Mrs Darlings lament). Perhaps then in Barrie's presentation of the child's timeless otherness, do we in fact see the materialisation of adult desires.

The portal fantasy structure also portrays the otherness of the child's mind with its schism of adult reality and child fantasy. Max's journey from reality to the fantastical wild things has overwhelmingly been seen by critics in this way, labelled as 'applied psychology, even common-sense Freudianism'[6]. From this perspective, the text's antagonistic structure represents a tension between ego and id, the symbolic and the real - shining a light on early childhood development. When the forest in Max's room begins to grow, he is depicted with eyes closed, conceivably plunging into a dream and the heart of the unconscious. Upon the island is the child's imagination released as Max joins the wild things, becoming 'the most wild thing of all'. He loses himself entirely to animalism and play in the all-encompassing unframed three page double-spread 'wild rumpus' scenes. Here, language subsides, suggesting Max's movement into a pre-linguistic state of 'the real'.

[6] Kenneth B Kidd, 'Maurice Sendak and Picturebook Psychology' in *Freud in Oz: At the Intersections of Psychoanalysis and Children's Literature* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), pp. 103-128, p. 120.

Rose argues that 'childhood is part of a strict development sequence at the end of which stands a cohered and rational consciousness of the adult mind'[7], and Max seems to be towards the beginning of this sequence. In *Peter and Wendy*, Barrie's adult world represents such a 'rational consciousness', in strict opposition to the children's imaginative mindscapes. Neverland is often hinted at as the child's imaginative psyche, described as forming part of 'a map of a child's mind' (p. 13). The description is psychological; for the children, Neverland is as if part of their subconscious. Indeed, when they arrive there it is 'not as something long dreamt of and seen at last but as a familiar friend to whom they were returning home for the holidays' (p. 48); they lay claim to the island, recognising Michael's 'cave' and John's 'Flamingo' (p. 50). By contrast, adults are presumed devoid of this imaginative space, they do not believe in the fantastical world - Mrs Darling 'had believed in him [Peter Pan] at the time, but now that she was married and full of sense she quite doubted whether there was any such person' (p. 16). The dualism between adult 'sense' and childish imagination ('non-sense') is clear, marking the latter other.

But the perceived Manichean adult-child relationality in *Wild Things* and *Peter and Wendy* can be seen to disintegrate on closer inspection of the affairs of the respective islands, challenging the other principle. While Max is one of the wild things - his mother calls him 'WILD THING', and the creatures christen him 'the wildest thing of all' - he is also seen ruling and dominating the wild things as he becomes 'king of all wild things', in an imperialist echo. Max sends them to bed without supper, in quasi-adult repetition of his

[7] Jaqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, or, The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), p. 13.

mother's verbal domination of him at the beginning of the text. Cast as subservient child-other, Max attempts to refute this status by imitating the actions of adult authority.

Similarly in *Peter and Wendy*, echoes of the adult world creep into the child-space, particularly through the performative parenting roles of Peter and Wendy. Peter, in parodic-elderly style boasts 'that he had gone for a walk for the good of his health' (p. 82), saying to Wendy, ''ah old lady,' […] 'there is nothing more pleasant of an evening for you and me when the day's toil is over than to rest by the fire with the little ones nearby.'' (p. 108). While this may seem just like amusing role-play, Peter knows no difference between play and truth ('to him make-believe and true were exactly the same thing'(p. 73)), thus, in some ways, he transcends the childishness he holds so dearly. And certainly, as leader of the lost boys, Peter does in fact act as a father figure. For Wendy, who seems to do nothing but look after 'the little ones', performative maturity merges into her reality. Arguably then, Peter, Wendy and Max all perform the adult expectations of gender-orientated roles through play. And it is ironic for the children of both texts, that in rejecting their caregivers and attempting to gain autonomy, they mature somewhat. Childishness and maturity mingle in the texts, confusing a clear-cut self-other binary.

But both the autonomous child and the occupation of a spatiotemporal 'other' land are impermanent. The cyclical narrative structures take the children back to their respective realities, where they must relinquish some of their otherness to adult social norms. In *Wild Things*, Max ends the wild rumpus, lured back home by the smell of 'good things to eat' – significantly the domestic archetype of cooked food that Max previously warped and was subsequently denied. Furthermore, when Max arrives home dinner is waiting for him - he has

accepted both the domestic and the maternal and his wild side has weakened. His bedroom is larger and the illustration unframed, suggesting some kind of growth. Gilead argues this is a 'psychic growth'[8], while Sendak himself argues it is an emotional one revealing 'how children master various feelings—anger, boredom, fear, frustration, jealousy—and manage to come to grips with the realities of their lives'[9]. It is also a social growth, an adjustment to adult society and its behavioural norms. These growths denote Max's maturation.

Nodelman writes,

> we encourage in children those values and behaviours that make children easier for us to handle: more passive, more docile, more obedient […]. It's no accident that the vast majority of stories for children share the message that, despite one's dislike of the constraints one feels there, home is still the best, the safest place to be.[10]

While Sendak's ending does abide by this adult-centric notion, Max also retains some of his independent wildness as the mother remains offstage and Max, still a boy, continues to wear his symbolic wolf suit. Furthermore, it would be a misapprehension to view the text's ending as embodying its entire meaning, as by and large, Sendak is occupied with the wild thing of *Wild Things* and the child-as-other.

The children of *Peter and Wendy* similarly return to their 'motherland'. As the dramatic opening narrative statement that, 'Wendy knew that she must grow up. You always know after you are two. Two is the beginning of the end.' suggests, 'growing up' was always looming. (p.9) The children are finally always viewed from the rather cynical 'end' point, the

[8] Sarah Gilead quoted by Ball, p. 168.
[9] Sendak quoted by Kidd, p. 104.
[10] Perry Nodelman 'The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children's Literature', *Children's Literature Quarterly Association*, 17.1, (1992) 29-35, (p. 31), <https://muse-jhu-edu.bris.idm.oclc.org/article/249281/pdf> accessed 29/12/20.

prevailing adult perspective. Peter Pan, the one boy who does not grow up - the ultimate other as eternal child - remains rooted in the world of fantasy, unable to exist. Peter Pan is even associated with the death of children ('when children died he went part of the way with them (p. 16)), as the fundamental symbol of non-reality. Neverland, as the name suggests, can 'never' be.

And for the children of Neverland who do grow up, the child-self is completely rejected for the adult one. 'You see that judge in a wig coming out at the iron door? That used to be Tootles. The bearded man who doesn't know any story to tell his children was once John' (p. 171). Tootles and John's identities are fractured, dually split into incongruent child and adult selves. Only in Wendy is there some resistance to adult assimilation - 'something inside her was crying, 'Woman, woman, let go of me' (p. 174) - but even then, the child is held captive, subservient to the adult. The transformation is colossal and the surrender to the adult self is all-encompassing, particularly by comparison to *Wild Things*.

But Barrie is unwilling to leave the image of the departed child as the text's ending. Instead, the narrative is recirculated indefinitely as a perpetual matrilineage of children are taken to Neverland:

> Jane [Wendy's daughter] is now a common grown up with a daughter called Margaret; and every springcleaning time, except when he forgets, Peter comes for Margaret and takes her to the Neverland […] When Margaret grows up she will have a daughter, who is to be Peter's mother in turn; and thus it will go on, so long as children are gay and innocent and heartless.
>
> (p. 178).

Nowhere in the text is the essentialization of the child so clear - 'gay and innocent and heartless'- as in the ending. The Rousseauian innocent and pre-moral child is the image the reader is left with. And this fabricated, romanticised child-other is immortalised, cast into

futurity. The ending is preoccupied with Peter Pan and Neverland, returning readers back to the narrative core and again, the child-as-other trope. The fantasy persists. As Rose writes 'Peter pan offer us the child – for ever'[11].

The narrator's role in *Peter and Wendy* is key to revealing the adult-centric nature of this fantasy. Their adult control of the text strips the child of agency, reducing them to subservient other. In the text, the adult nature of the narrator is revealed at the beginning as they say 'we too have been there [Neverland] ; we can still hear the sound of the surf, though we shall land no more' (p. 14). It is lamented that Neverland is inaccessible to adults, but the loss is rectified as both adult narrator and addressee proceed to land there once more through the very text, re-living the 'dream' of an ideal childhood. Accordingly, Neverland is the narrator's fantasy rather than that of the child's imagination. They construct it and its story with such a self-aware, metafictional style that it is clearly deemed their own. They note, 'for we purposely stopped the clock that this knowledge might be spared him: a little mark of respect from us at the end' (p. 155), smug with narrative superiority and drawing attention to the fictional process. While the narrator aligns themself with the child here by posing as creative imaginary - 'us', 'we' – they then undercut this inclusionary spirit: 'which of these adventures shall we choose?...I have tossed'. Their control and presence in the text is thus displayed. Jackson argues that fantasy 'is a literature of desire'[12]; and for *Peter and Wendy*, it is a literature of the narrator's adult desire for the romanticised child-other and its world. Again is the child seen as 'Other' through its comparison to the dominant adult position.

[11] Rose, p. 1.
[12] Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 3.

In *Wild Things*, the neutral adult voice of the narrator reveals no hidden-agendas for the child-other and does not hold the same overriding, consistent power as the narrator of *Peter and Wendy*, particularly given that the text is a picture book. Indeed, Sendak aimed to create a child-centred book - Waller writes, *Wild Things* "may actually be about [real] children"[13]. Instead, there is a tension between image and narrative in the text, corresponding to the cultural assumption that the images of children's picture books belong to the child and the narrative belongs to the adult reading to the child. Often, the narrative contradicts the images, as when Max 'came to the place where the wild things are/ they roared their terrible roars and gnashed their terrible teeth', he confronts supposedly terrifying creatures, yet the images clearly show the wild things smiling. Visually, the white boxes of the narrative also juxtapose the colourful illustrations and spatially, the narrative is pushed further and further out of the text until it is entirely excluded in the three-page 'wild rumpus' spread. Spitz writes that here, the child listening is transported 'to the realm of his or her own private imagination'[14]. The child's unfiltered access to the world of pictures frees it to be other outside of adult authority, unlike the adult narrator's construction of otherness in *Peter and Wendy*. But after this sequence, narrative regains a place as Max transitions back towards home, until on the final page there is only text. The interaction between narrative and picture comes to represent the adult's role in the text, following the structure of Max's journey. Thus at the height of Max's non-conformity to the adult world ('the wild rumpus'), there are only pictures; while on the final page when Max has accepted some adult behavioural-norms and maternal care, there is only text. Accordingly, the voice-pictorial tension reenforces the adult-

[13] Jennifer Waller quoted by Jennifer Shaddock, '*Where the Wild Things Are*: Sendak's Journey into the Heart of Darkness' *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 22 (1997), 155-159, (p. 159), < https://muse-jhu-edu.bris.idm.oclc.org/article/249657/pdf> accessed 07/01/21.

[14] Ellen Handler Spitz, *Inside Picture Books* (London: Yale UP, 1999), p. 125.

child binary of the text. The symbolic child has more freedom, yet it is still other to the adult and its voice.

Said writes that 'imaginative geography and history help the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away'[15]. While his is a racial discourse, Said's dialectic can be transferred onto the child-adult relations of *Peter and Wendy* and *Wild Things.* The 'imaginative geography and history' is the fantastical spatiotemporal otherness of the islands, the 'self' the adult-self, the 'distance and difference' the physical and symbolic gap between child and adult. This distance, intensifies the adult's sense of self. The adult world is grounded by its non-childishness in the same way that the child-world is established by its non-adultness. Ironically, the adult lurks silently at the center of these children's texts rather than the child, the genre name occluding their presence. Rose articulates this conundrum, writing of 'a set of problems, or evasions, in the very concept of children's fiction itself'[16]. The dominant adult of the texts – exhibited through the adult mainland's position, its time norms and reality quality as well as the narrative – is what marks the child 'Other', through relationality. While Peter, Wendy and the lost boys are a different type of child to Max, their leading trait is their otherness from the adult, whether it be their heartless innocence or wildness.

[15] Edward W. Said, 'Orientalism', *The Georgia Review*, 31.1 (1977), 162-206, p. 168, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41397448> accessed 03/01/21.
[16] Rose, p. 1.

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