THE CONCEPT OF OTHER WORLD IN J.M. BARRIE’S PETER PAN

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Abstract

Neverland sebagai sebuah dunia lain merupakan dunia yang ambigu. Keambiguan tersebut diperlihatkan dari dua sisi Neverland, yang merupakan representasi dari dua fase subjektivitas, the Imaginary dan Symbolic. Oleh karena itu penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan psikoanalis, dari teori subjektivitas Lacan, untuk memperlihatkan Neverland sebagai analogi dari dua fase tersebut. Sisi Imaginary dari Neverland diperlihatkan dari keterpenuhan dan keutuhan, sedangkan sisi Symbolic Neverland diperlihatkan melalui ketidakmampuannya dalam memberikan pemenuhan. Sisi Symbolic, yang disebabkan oleh lackness, menyebabkan Neverland menjadi sebuah dunia yang ambigu, dan keambiguan tersebut akhirnya menunjukkan bahwa Neverland adalah dunia yang tidak sempurna.

Kata kunci: Other world, keambiguan, Imaginary, Symbolic, lackness

BACKGROUND

Children’s literature is often related to fantasy, since many works under this category insert fantasy elements into the story. This fantasy often comes in a form of supernatural beings or magical worlds where impossibility and irrationality occur. Hogwarts, Narnia, Oz, Wonderland, Middle Earth and Neverland are some of those magical worlds, in which some kinds of magical creatures like dragon, elf, unicorn, fairies, and mermaid are to be found. Some unusual occurrences like getting the body shrunk or fighting against monster while flying on broomstick can also happen in these magical lands. So great the portrays of these worlds that fantasy, as Jackson states, has been claimed as ‘transending’ reality, escaping the human condition and constructing superior alternate, ‘secondary’ worlds.(2)

Not only having creatures that unlikely exist in reality, these worlds also permit the characters to do things that are forbidden in real world. For instance, Harry Potter, without restriction, can spell magic and cast jinxes in Hogwarts, whereas the real world and his Muggle relatives forbid him to do so. Meanwhile, Peter Pan and the Lost Boys can avoid being grown-ups in real world and instead, fly to Neverland, a land that turns them into eternal children. As it seems, other world, besides working as magical land where impossibility happens, also functions as escapism from the real, often cruel, world.
However, the existence of other world, as a super world and a means of escapism, doesn’t automatically turn it into a perfect world. As much as it tries to provide everything with its ability in turning wildest dreams into reality, other world could not help but accepting the fact that there are things that it cannot fulfill, and there are things in life, no matter whichever world a person lives in, that cannot be avoided. This inability in fulfilling needs tarnishes the ‘perfection’ of those other, super worlds. One of such worlds, about which this research will further discuss, is Neverland.

Neverland, a magical world in J.M. Barrie’s Peter Pan, is a fairy land which serves as an other world. Its magical sides are shown in certain ways; it is occupied with supernatural creatures like fairies and mermaids, the characters can fly around using fairy dust, and it can keep people from growing up physically. Besides being a magical land, Neverland also serves as escapism. Peter Pan, the main character in this novel, flies away to this land in order to avoid being grown-ups, something that naturally and normally happens in real world. These magical sides, as well as its ability in permitting the impossibility to take place, have turned Neverland, using Gilead’s words, as “an idealized realm of childhood”. (100)

This side of being a means of escapism as well as granting hidden wish mark Neverland as a world of completeness. This especially works for Peter, who wishes to always be a little boy and have fun. In this land, not only he is able to preserve his youth, but he also experiences lots of adventures and fun.

Still, there are things that Neverland fails to provide. As much as it tries to supply everything, however impossible it is, it still lacks in certain things. This lackness turns Neverland as an ambiguous world that stands on two states; one side shows that it is actually a representation of a perfect, children world, and another side shows how this ‘perfect’ world fails in providing ‘some things’.

These two sides of Neverland reflect those two of three realms in Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory about human subjectivity stages. The side of Neverland, in which one can find completeness, best reflects the Imaginary, the second realm a person has to go through in his way of finding his subjectivity. Through its reflection of Imaginary, Neverland works as a realm of wholeness, that is, in Peter’s case, a place where a person can find what he wants in a single place. In this case, Peter’s wishes that make Neverland as a place of completeness are youth, fun, and family.

The other side of Neverland, in relation with Lacan’s subjectivity phases, echoes the Symbolic, the last stage that a person has to experience in order to become an independent being. In this stage, Lacan said, a child has to undergo a castration, a separation from his mother, to complete his subjectivity and be able to enter the society. This separation is
caused by the existence of Law of the Father. Law of the Father, as Mansfield stated, is anything that comes and separates the child from its mother (31). The separation, after all, leaves a lackness in the child’s once complete world. This condition of separation and lackness is what makes Neverland similar to that of the Symbolic realm. As much as it works as a world of completeness for Peter, by being able to grant youth, continuous adventures and fun, as well as a short-lived family, in the end, it fails to stop Wendy’s determination to return to the real world and to her family, resulting in Peter’s being separated from Wendy and his friends, which marks his condition of lackness. Having these two sides seem to make Neverland as an ambiguous world.

**Research Purppse**

Thus in this research, I would like to prove how Neverland stands as an ambiguous world, and how lackness causes this ‘perfect’ world to be ambiguous.

This research aims to show that other world in J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan* is actually a representation of an ambiguity.

**Research Method**

This literary research is done using psychoanalysis approach, using Jacque Lacan’s subjectivity theory as its basis, as well as some other Lacanian thoughts. I intentionally use Lacan’s theory since it connects the phases of one’s subjectivity process with language symbolism. Thus, explanation will be divided into three parts. The first part will explain the concept of one’s subjectivity process, and the three phases a person needs to go through – The Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic – in order to become a complete, independent self. The second part will show how other world in *Peter Pan* is seen as an ambiguous world that stands between Symbolic and Imaginary realm. This part will also show the existence of Law of the Father that marks Symbolic order. Meanwhile the third part will reveal how other world lacks in certain thing, and how this lackness causes the other world to be ambiguous and turns it into an imperfect world.

**DISCUSSION**

**The Subjectivity theory**

To begin with, I shall explain the phases of subjectivity. Psychoanalysis, a study in observing unconsciousness, has strong connection with subjectivity process, in which a person has to undergo stages of realms in order to become a complete, independent individual. This theory, to be known as Subjectivity theory, is developed by an Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1865-1939).

In his theory, Freud divided the process into three: oral stage, anal stage, and phallic stage. Oral stage starts in the early years of a baby’s life, in which the baby has a strong bound with its mother since it depends on her for her nurture. This strong bound, as the anal stage takes
place, creates a sexual desire as well as possessive feeling the baby feels towards its mother. In the last phase or phallic stage, the baby has to experience a castration, a separation from the mother, as it meets the father figure, a figure that introduces the baby to “symbolic role of Manhood” in its adulthood. This stages work in one mechanism that Freud calls as Oedipus Complex. Oedipus Complex introduces the baby to “…morality, conscience, law, and all forms of social and religious authority.” (Eagleton 153-156)

Freud’s theory of subjectivity process relates to gender and power, as he suggested that only the owner of the penis, in this case men, can own power, stable identity, and order (Mansfield 47). This concept of power later works in many binary opposition, identity-related analogies such as self and other, West and East, as well as men and women.

Freud’s subjectivity theory develops from time to time, and one of its developments is invented by Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), who relates subjectivity process with language symbolism. Instead of using the stages above to indicate someone’s identity development, Lacan comes up with The Real, The Imaginary, and The Symbolic. Unlike Freud, who sees the phases literally, Lacan perceives the process as symbolism. The Real, as Lacan suggests, works as the early phase in which a baby feels as an inseparable unity with his mother. At this stage the baby has yet to develop a concept of a complete self, and instead, feels that he is a part of everything around him. So pure and whole this realm is that language is unable to describe the completeness of this stage, because the Real, as Eagleton stated, is “…inaccessible realm which is always beyond the reach of significations, always outside the symbolic order.” (168)

The Identification process then moves from the Real to the Imaginary, in which a transition from a ‘fragmented body’ to ‘a form of totality’ takes place. (Lacan 899) This is the phase where the infant learns to identify himself that later serves as the basic of his fantasy-based self identification.

Basically, The Imaginary is a stage in which a child learns to identify its full form from what he sees through its reflection. It is the time where the child sees the unity of its body and feels a sense of wholeness upon looking at its total form reflection and then marks the reflection he sees as “I”. As Eagleton suggested, It is a world of [plenitude], with no lacks or exclusions of any kind: standing before the mirror, the ‘signifier’ (the child) finds a ‘fullness’, a whole and unblemished identity, in the signified of its reflection. No gap has yet opened up between the signifier and signified, subject and world. The infant is so far happily unplugged by the problems of post-structuralism- by the fact that, as we have seen, language and reality are not so smoothly synchronized as this situation would suggest. (166)
Thus, the first identification process where a child builds the foundation of its identity is built from fantasy level, from outside source of its body. Besides finding a sense of fullness upon looking at its reflection, the child also feels a sense of wholeness in relation with its mother. At this pre-Oedipal stage, the child, depending on its mother for being fed and kept warm, develops sexual feelings towards its mother. As for the girl, its sexual feelings will later move towards the father.

The last phase of one’s subjectivity process is the Symbolic, in which the child has to be castrated, that is to be separated from his mother and therefore suffers a great loss, in order to become a complete, independent being. This separation is caused by the existence of Law of the Father, in which social construction, consisting of rules and roles, exists. Mellard, in this case, argued that Law of the Father “…symbolize[s] that which comes between the mother and the child, separating the one from the other.”(31) That is to say, Symbolic Order is pre-given structure of social and sexual roles and relations which make up the family and society. To be accepted into the society, the child has to learn two rules: a) it cannot be its parent’s lover and b) it must give up its earlier bond to its mother’s body. (Eagleton 145)

With the castration, the child now has to accept the fact that he can no longer posses its mother, and instead, it has to repressed its now guilty desire of wanting to posses the now prohibited mother’s body, creating “the unconscious”, or repressed desire as the result. This painful road that he child is taken is necessary because “…Only by accepting the necessity of sexual difference, of a distinct gender roles that the child, who has previously been unaware of such problems, can become properly “socialized”. (Eagleton 144)

As the child is now thrown into the world of lackness, the child then discovers the world language, and by doing so, it learns that language works by difference and absence.

To sum up, a person needs to go through three stages of subjectivity in order to become a complete self being. The Real serves as the first stage, in which an infant depends on its mother for her nurture. The second stage is The Imaginary, where the child forms his first self identification through the reflection he sees. This happens in a scheme called The Mirror Stage. At this stage, the child feels wholeness as he sees himself, through the reflection, in a total form. This stage will also become the basis of how he perceives himself in the future. The last stage that a person needs to go is called the Symbolic, in which the child has to be castrated, separated from his mother to be able to stand on his own and be accepted in the society. This castration is caused by Law of the Father. Law of the Father means everything that separates the child from its mother. The great loss he suffers upon the castration marks his
entrance to the world of language. In the future, the child will continually try to find a fulfillment to cover what he lacks. This is what is called desire. Desire is insatiable because what it is looking for is returning from the Symbolic to the Imaginary, which is, by no means, impossible.

**Other World as the representation of ambiguity between Imaginary and Symbolic.**

Now that the Lacan’s subjectivity has been explained, I shall continue by showing how other world in fiction work, in this case Neverland, represents both Imaginary and Symbolic realms and, in that way, makes it an ambiguous world, and how lackness causes this ambiguity. I will divide the explanation into three: a) Neverland represents the Imaginary, b) Neverland represents the Symbolic, and c) how lackness causes Neverland’s ambiguity.

**Neverland as the representation of Imaginary phase**

Neverland serves as Peter’s means of escapism. He doesn’t want to grow old, and instead, wants to remain a child. Therefore, he flies to Neverland and builds his own, using Gilead’s words, *idealized realm of childhood*. In this part, I would like to show parts of Neverland that indicates this land as the ideal, perfect world for Peter. Those parts are youth, fun, and family.

a) **Youth**

“All children, except one, grow up.” (Barrie 1)

Peter Pan is known for being a boy who doesn’t grow up. He stays in the body, and he acts like a little boy. This is a reason why he escapes from his family and the real world, flies to Neverland, and builds his own world. For some reason he doesn’t want to grow old, like what he said to Wendy:

“It was because I heard father and mother,” he explained in a low voice, “talking about what I was to be when I became a man.” He was extraordinary agitated now. “[I don’t want ever to be a man],” he said with passion. “I want always to be a little boy and to have fun. So I ran away to Kensington Garden and lived a long long time among the fairies.” (Barrie 28)

As he stated, he wanted to remain as a child because he wanted to always have fun. It may relates to the concept that “childhood” means “fun”, while “adulthood” means “responsibility”. The more people grow up, the less people can have fun, and the more responsibility they need to bear. It seems that the idea of growing up frightens Peter so much that he finally chooses to leave reality. Neverland then, works as escapism from adulthood and a place that can grant his wish to always become a little boy. This condition, in Jackson’s description about fantasy works, can be said as “…transcending reality, escaping the human
condition and constructing superior alternate, ‘secondary’ worlds.” (2)

Besides Neverland, another factor that preserves Peter’s youth is the Lost Boys. The Lost Boys are a bunch of kids who fall from their pram and are sent to Neverland if they are not claimed in seven days (Barrie 2). Peter acts as their captain, and together, they live in through adventurous days. This is a great picture of **Mirror Stage** in Lacan’s Imaginary realm. At this stage, a child mistakenly identifies his reflection as himself and names that reflection as, Lacan stated, “The Ideal I’. Thus, the Mirror Stage, can be seen as “…the climactic intuition of wholeness and completeness of the self.” (Mansfield42). The child finds a sense of completeness upon seeing the reflection, finding something that he can identify himself as. In this way, the foundation of self identify actually comes from “fantasy” level, from the image outside the body. As the child grows up, Eagleton said, he will continue to make that kind of imaginary identification with objects, and that is how his ego will be built up (165). Therefore, we can say that Peter needs to be surrounded by little fellows because that is how he can always identify himself as one of them.

b) **Fun**

“Adventures, of course, as we shall see, were of daily occurrences;…” (Barrie 81)

Living in Neverland promises adventures and games. Occupied by uncommon, magical beings like mermaids, fairies, pirates, Red Skin tribes, and the tickling crocodile, Neverland works as a dreamland that can provide lots of fun for its inhabitants. Here is a description of what Peter’s life in Neverland can be:

*He often went out alone, and when he came back, you were never absolutely certain whether he had had an adventure or not. He might have forgotten about it so completely that he said nothing about it; on the other hand, he might say a great deal about it, and yet you could not find the body. Sometimes he came home with bandaged, and then Wendy cooed over him and bathed him in lukewarm water, while he told dazzling tale. But she was never quite sure, you know* (Barrie 81-82)

As it is described there, Neverland delivers a lot of fun for its inhabitants, and in this way Neverland helps Peter in getting what he wants: to be a little boy and to always have fun.

c) **Family**

Wendy’s arrival in Neverland brings something new to Peter and the Lost Boys. Not only she becomes the female companion that brightens up their lives, but she also makes their secret wish
of having a mother comes true. She acted as their kind, affectionate mother and did enjoy her role. She did what common mothers would normally do: preparing meals, telling bed-time stories, as well as fixing holes on their clothes. The mother role that she played so well, eventually, cured Peter’s bitter memory of his own mother, who, according to his story, had forgotten all about him and got a new child taken over Peter’s position. This is why he stated that “For one thing he despised all mothers except Wendy...”(Barrie 80-81). While Wendy served her role as a mother, Peter, on the other side, played both as the father and, another time, as a devoted son. Thus, how happy and contented he was at that moment can be described as follows: So, they were told they could dance, but they must put their nighties first.

“Ah, old lady,” Peter said aside to Wendy, warming himself by the fire and looking down at her as she sat turning wheel, “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.” (Barrie 110)

As it can be seen, how much happiness he felt for having a family, although it was just a make-believe, does reflect that at that moment Neverland seemed to provide everything he wanted: youth, fun, and family. The fact that Neverland succeeds in fulfilling Peter’s need makes this world as a representation of the Imaginary, which is described as a realm of “completeness” or “wholeness”.

**Neverland as the representation of Symbolic phase**

Unfortunately, like anything in the world, there is nothing that lasts forever. Peter’s world of wholeness comes to an end when Wendy, followed by the Lost Boys, finally decided to go back to the real world, when they realized that their runaway might have caused great sorrow to their own mother. Peter, however, refused to leave with them as he had no wish to return to the real world and find his long lost mother. He could do well without her, and he could only remember her bad points (Barrie 120-121). So, while Peter was thinking of trick to hold their leave, Wendy, her two brothers and the Lost Boys bid Peter goodbye and left. Unavoidably, since he refused to go together with them, he then had to lose his mother figure as well as his mates.

Peter’s longing for a mother figure is actually a result of his previous castration. The result of the castration, that is being separated from the mother, is that there is a hole of lackness in his once world of completeness. As he is unable to get back the mother’s body, he then develops guilty desire or the unconscious. What the desire really
seeks for is returning to the mother-child unity, locking up the hole of lackness he is now suffering. As it was impossible to get, the child then seeks for another fulfillment, in a shape of the [m]other (Mellard 19).

This is what actually happening to Peter. The great loss he suffers after being separated from his biological mother demands a fulfillment. That is why he flies to the real world in search for a mother figure, and finds it in Wendy. During his moment of having Wendy around, he feels great contentment because not only he can achieve ceaseless youth as what he wishes for, but he also experiences having a family, even though it is only short-lived and make-believe.

Peter’s seeking for fulfillment for his loss, however, did not cease after Wendy decided to stay in the real world and leave him. During spring cleaning time, he would continue to go and get another mother-figure through Wendy’s daughter, Jane, and years later, through Jane’s daughter, Margaret. This endless substitution for mother figure resembles the desire he feels but unable to lock up.

As you look at Wendy you may see her hair becoming white, and her figure little again, for all this happened long ago. Jane is now a common grown-up, with a daughter called a Margaret; and every spring-cleaning time, except when he forgets, Peter comes for Margaret and takes her to the Neverland, where she tells stories about himself, to which he listens eagerly. 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. (Barrie 185)

Through these happenings, it seems that Neverland is no longer a world that provides and allows everything. Wendy’s departure from Neverland marks the end of the world of completeness and the emergence of loss, of a lack. Peter is castrated, that is separated from the “mother” Wendy, because she wants to go back to her family. Her choice of going back to the real world, which is eagerly followed by the Lost Boys, left Peter alone. With Wendy’s departure, Peter’s once whole condition now lacks. He now has to accept the fact that he can no longer have Wendy as well as the Lost Boys because they belong to the world he doesn’t want to live in. This condition reflects that of Symbolic stage, in which the Law of the Father exists. It castrates Peter, from his “mother”, Wendy, and makes him lack. Peter’s condition, in other way, moves from wholeness that reflects the Imaginary to lackness that represent the Symbolic.

Through this happening, it can be stated that the nature of growing up, works as Law of the Father. Law of the Father functions as the ruler, the one that shapes society construction. Under the rules that make the society, children will grow up and eventually become adults. When they become adults, they will normally take more
responsibility; for example by going to work. These, however, frightens Peter so much that he chooses to refuse Mrs. Darling’s appeal to adopt him, abandoning the idea of having a mother with Wendy and the Lost Boys close to him. He chooses to fly back to Neverland, having the consequence of losing his friend and his dearest “mother”, Wendy.

Mrs. Darling and Wendy try to persuade Peter to take the offer of being adopted. Yet, the fear of growing up and getting old conquer Peter’s will to be with Wendy. However, Peter’s decision for refusing Mrs. Darling’s offer marks the separated ways of Wendy and Peter.

“Would you send me to school?” he inquired craftily.
“Yes.”
“And then to an office?”
“I suppose so.”
“Soon I should be a man?”
“Very soon.”
“I don’t want to go to school and learn solemn things,” he told her passionately. “I don’t want to be a man. O Wendy’s mother, if I was to wake up and feel there was a beard.”

“Peter,” said Wendy the comforter, “I should love you in a beard”; and Mrs. Darling stretched out her arms to him, but he repulsed her.
“Keep back, lady, no one is going to catch me and make me a man.”
(Barrie 174)

As he decided to leave for Neverland alone, Peter has to accept the fact that he could not be with both Wendy and his friends anymore, and this creates a lack in him. This lackness, in Lacan’s subjectivity scheme, is a great cost that a person needs to pay in order to become a complete, independent self.

Lackness as the cause of other world’s ambiguity

As it is explained above, Peter’s world of plenitude came to an end, as Wendy, the replacement of his original mother, and the Lost Boys, his loyal companions, chose to leave him, coming back to the real world. Since he refused to be adopted by Mrs. Darlings, then he had to go back to Neverland alone.

“I shall have such fun,” said Peter, with one eye on Wendy.
“It will rather lonely in the evening,” she said, “sitting by the fire.”
“I shall have Tink.”
“Tink can’t go a twentieth part of the way round,” she reminded him a little tartly.
...
“It doesn’t matter,” Peter said.
“O Peter, you know it matters.”
(Barrie 175)

Peter keeps coming back to the real world, looking for another young girl to play as his mother. Yet, it cannot deny the fact that this place lacks of mother figure. This mother figure, is the reason why Peter flies to Wendy’s window and also Wendy’s reason of leaving Neverland. Therefore, this lack of mother figure, which Neverland fails to provide, marks the incompleteness of Neverland as an other world.
Years later, when Wendy grew old and Wendy’s daughter has has grown into a mother of a daughter, Peter, however, stayed exactly the same like he had always been: a boy who looked for a little girl every spring, cleaning time, to be brought to Neverland and be his make-believe mother.

This shows that Peter’s crave for a mother has not been satisfied, and that is why after all the years, he keeps on looking for one. When one no longer fits to be his mother, in this case the girl has much grown up, he will search for another one and make an endless end. As Eagleton explained, “All desire springs from a lack, which it strives continually to fulfill.” (167), Peter’s condition, in this case, reflects what a person will have to go through after experiencing a castration that separates him from his mother. This never-ending substitution also indicates that the person enters the world of language, in exchange of what has been taken from him.

In the end, it is a choice that makes it different. Wendy and the Lost Boys choose to go back to the real world and take whatever it provides: having family and growing up. Meanwhile, Peter chooses to stay in Neverland, insisting on living alone rather than giving up his youth and growing up. This marks that Neverland, once given him completeness through Wendy and the Lost Boys, now just the same like the real world is, the imperfect world.

CONCLUSION

Other world in fantasy is one of fantastical world, in which, mostly, magical creatures live and irrational happening occurs. This is one world that allows unimaginable things to happen and also becomes a means of escapism. Because of that, other world is perceived as a perfect world that allows everything forbidden in real world. One of such world is Neverland.

Neverland is a magical land where fairies, mermaids, and Peter Pan, the boy who never grows up, live. Neverland works as a world of wholeness for Peter for it provides everything he wants: youth, adventure, and family. At this stage, Neverlands represent that stage of completeness in Lacan’s subjectivity stages, The Imaginary. The Imaginary is the second stage of subjectivity process, where an infant finds completeness in him.

However, the need for coming back to the real world and to her family made Wendy, who acted as Peter and the Lost Boys’ mother in Neverland, left that fantastic world. Her departure, which was followed by the Lost Boys, marks Peter’s new world of lackness. He lost that of mother figure, and he tried to get it back. At this stage Neverland no longer represents that of Imaginary realm, but it more depicts that of Symbolic phase. The Symbolic is the stage in which someone needs to suffer a great loss of losing their mother, in order to become a complete, independent being.

The two conditions show Neverland as an ambiguous world. On one side
it seems to provide everything and, therefore, represents The Imaginary phase. On the other side, it cannot hide something that it cannot provide, and this turns Neverland as the representation of the Symbolic. This Symbolic side of Neverland is caused by insatiable lackness. The two sides of Neverland, in the end, shows that this magical world is not a perfect world.

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