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Sewn to and Ripping the Threads off the Shadow of Barrie: On Jenny Bouilly

not merely because of the unknown that was stalking toward them, by
Jenny Bouilly. Grafton, VT: Tarpaulin Sky Press, 2011.

"I ought to mention here that the following is our way with a story," begins the narrator in *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*. "First I tell it . . . and then he tells it to me . . . and then I retell it with his additions, and so we go on until no one could say whether it is more his story or mine."

And here we have one way to approach Jenny Bouilly's *not merely because of the unknown that was stalking toward them*. Her "dark revisioning" lives in the liminal: between Barrie's *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* and *Peter and Wendy* are Bouilly's words, in bed with and charging against their source texts. *not merely because of the unknown* is in the betwixt-and-between, a place of its own making. In this space made by Bouilly, a more generous place than Barrie's, everything is in-between—every character, the narrator, even the form of the book—as Bouilly's words both shadow and cast shadows on Barrie's iconic characters.

The italicized words and phrases in Bouilly's book could represent a rejection of Barrie's need for the seamless—a way of demarcating what's not italicized is what's hers. In excerpts of the book published prior to its final publication, Bouilly cites the italicized words. Abandoning them in the final book was the right choice. Because even the italics are in the in-between. If we're familiar with Barrie's books, we read in Bouilly, "Dearest Tink, should you and I together *unionize* against the Peter? Equal pay for equal work, we'll say," and wonder to ourselves, "*Why can't we remember when Barrie used that verb?*" Because forgetting plays a role in Barrie's books, Bouilly's italics often play the role of false memories. And yet so many of Bouilly's individual words italicized, a "*there*" an "*alone*," work. Like thimbles. To become something we never knew and now can't forget.

But in this betwixt-and-between, the italics behave another way. While Bouilly sometimes gestures towards Barrie's words in the way he intended, "Not rum, but rather, the *miasma of night*; that's all the pirates drink and need to stay. Alive," she soon takes ownership of a word. She won't need to italicize it again: "The *miasma*, the *miasma of night* is between your legs, Wendy. I do say! Do you think Hook can have a *look*" Bouilly re-visions a new context for *miasma*, though it's yet tethered to its source.

This is Wendy's book. Wendy, who is given so little in *Peter and Wendy*, where she disappears under ground or above, into the surface of domestic, of woe-man spinster, worries to Peter, "I have now passed my best, but you don't want to change me do you?" Barrie's Wendy calms Peter by touching him "solicitously, lower down than his chest." Barrie's Wendy, whose "cooking . . . kept her nose to the pot," becomes "only a woman" and runs away in the final pages. But she is much more realized in Bouilly's re-telling; throughout the book, we move back and forth between a seeming indictment of Barrie's treatment of her, "We'll just pass Wendy round and round," to a Wendy with agency. Bouilly's Wendy threatens to go to Hook "who knows how to *tickle* things . . . He doesn't even mind a bit of blood." Bouilly's Wendy knows better; she "will not be there...not in a hovel, not in a bottle, not in a happy ending novel, not in a kitchen serving eggs for two, and certainly not in a parallel grave from you." The sing-song seems to complicate Wendy's resistance, a way of reminding us that this re-visited liminality is still sewn to Barrie's creation. And so Bouilly's Wendy still loves Peter, still waits for his return to the nursery even after she's grown. But while Barrie's Wendy waits passive, and feels "untrue to [Peter] when she got a prize for general knowledge," Bouilly's Wendy takes action: "(Nana, Nana, Nana. I'll secure my feminine diaper to you; I'll say that you are the one who is menstruating.)" Bouilly's Wendy knows so much more than Barrie ever gave her credit: "And what size *were* mother's thighs? Peter, this, even you *should know*." Bouilly's Wendy uses Barrie's words against him: "*Sometimes, though not often, [Peter] had dreams, and they were more painful than the dreams of other boys*. So let us see then, Peter, how will you fare when there is no one here to wake you."

Bouilly's Wendy is always becoming. Trapped. In the age of betwixt-and-between, she is discovering a dormant power only hinted at by Barrie.

But even as all this happens, Bouilly's slippery narrator makes us wonder whether what we are reading is "*what actually happened*"

or instead, just "*what you wanted to believe.*" Bouilly subverts Barrie's controlling original narrator, who knows so much that we don't know; Bouilly cripples the passivity Barrie forced on the reader, makes the narration into a place so much less stagnant. Her narrator floats, haunts, becomes Wendy, Peter, Hook, even the reader. We're not sure who says, "It isn't quite fair how Peter oftentimes, always gets authorship," or who speaks in the parenthetical "(Why? Why don't you talk, Peter, about your dead brother? I think that's the story we would like to hear.)" Which of Bouilly's character knows that this question to Peter is a question to Barrie himself, who in his real life pretended to be a dead boy, his brother, to comfort his grieving mother? Who knows that Peter has a past in a different book? "If ever you think that Hook is doing something or that Peter is doing something, you must remember that it is the storyteller who is doing something," we read in Bouilly. But what is this something and who is the storyteller?

Bouilly's mode of narration embodies a particularly interesting aside in Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*. "I don't know whether you have ever seen a map of a person's mind," says the narrator. "Doctors sometimes draw maps of other parts of you...but catch them trying to draw a map of a child's mind, which is not only confused but keeps going round all the time...there are zigzag lines on it," along with coral reefs, religion, gnome tailors, "verbs that take the derivative," these and so much more "are part of the island or they are another map showing through."

It is what is already drawn by Barrie, and what shows through Bouilly, that brings us finally to the form of the book. On each page is text where we expect it, and then a line and a label *The Home Under Ground* under which there is more text. These sections are not footnotes. Are they maps showing through? Are they are a doubling of the narrative? Just as Peter is not Peter so much as Barrie's dead brother is Peter is Barrie. Just as Wendy is Maimie Merrington is Barrie's mother. Is *The Home Under Ground* a re-telling of each page, of everything that comes above? A re-visioning of a re-vision? Is this because, no matter what happens in *The Home Under Ground* or in Bouilly's re-visioning, there is only a "No" in answer to the question "Is it that you retell a story to make it. True?"

As we finish the book, physically close it, and see only the title, this is when Bouilly's re-visioning becomes arrested. When we, like Peter, are trapped, because "*not merely because of the unknown that was stalking toward them*" comes from a moment of true fear in *Peter and Wendy*. The tide is rising and the Lost Boys are asleep on a rock and

they and Wendy will soon be engulfed and die if she doesn't wake them. And she doesn't wake them, because Wendy's only pretending to be a mother and thinks she shouldn't. "Wendy will find her way by following," we are told in Boully's book. But both Barrie's and Boully's Wendy is following something false, the notion of a mother she doesn't understand and isn't. In this make-believe there is the threat of real consequence. This is a moment of stasis; where the betwixt-and-between freezes. Is this the *real* that threatens? Is this when we answer the question, "Do you know the difference between real and make-believe," in the negative? Or maybe we were never safe in the first place, because "We shall just carry on *like this*—with a storytelling of things that *may* or *may not* be."