



A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE MASCULINITIES PORTRAYED IN HOOK (STEVEN SPIELBERG, 1991)

Un análisis textual de las masculinidades representadas en Hook (Steven Spielberg, 1991)

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KEYWORDS

Hook
Masculinities
Peter Pan
Steven Spielberg
Textual Analysis
Gender Studies
Film Studies

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the masculinities shown throughout Steven Spielberg's Hook, following Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumim's four sites of masculinities in film. Robin Williams's character (Peter Banning/Pan) evolves from belonging to the business man prototype (Peter Banning) to becoming an adult-although-rejuvenated Peter Pan. His body is shown in action when Banning/Pan attempts to behave in a more juvenile way. Banning/Pan's external world is defined by his fatherhood, which involves both quality and quantity time spent with his children. The internal world is related to Banning/Pan's fear of flying and death.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Hook
Masculinidades
Peter Pan
Steven Spielberg
Análisis textual
Estudios de género
Estudios sobre cine

RESUMEN

Este artículo se centra en las masculinidades representadas en Hook, de Steven Spielberg, siguiendo los cuatro entornos de masculinidades en el cine de Pat Kirkham y Janet Thumim. El personaje de Robin Williams (Peter Banning/Pan) evoluciona desde el prototipo de hombre de negocios (Peter Banning) hasta un Peter Pan adulto-aunque-rejuvenecido. Se muestra su cuerpo en acción cuando Banning/Pan intenta comportarse de manera más juvenil. Su mundo externo está definido por su paternidad, que le requiere tiempo de calidad y en cantidad con sus hijos. El mundo interno está relacionado con el miedo de Banning/Pan a volar y a la muerte.

Recibido: 29/ 09 / 2022

Aceptado: 30/ 11 / 2022

1. Introduction

Hook (Spielberg, 1991) is a difficult to classify film, according to David Caldevilla-Domínguez (2005, p. 47). Lester Friedman (2006, pp. 11-62), in one of the most comprehensive approaches to Steven Spielberg's career to this date, has grouped *Hook* together with the director's science-fiction and fantasy films, more specifically within the fantastic genre, as well as *Always* (Spielberg, 1989b). Caldevilla-Domínguez affirms that, in *Hook*, Spielberg did not want to retell the story of Peter Pan (2000, p. 648). This means that the most accurate analysis should not derive from the connection with the traditional tale but with a rereading based on the inner evolution of the protagonist.

Hook portrays an adult Peter Pan. As Nigel Morris puts it:

Hook is Spielberg's most and least typical film. From a crudely biographical perspective, it articulates interests and themes consciously discussed over years in interviews, and embodies concerns easily mapped in Spielberg's 'private' life. Studio publicity actively encouraged such readings, setting the agenda for reviewers. On the other hand, a massive calculated money-spinner – the kind Spielberg is widely associated with – *Hook* is arguably a project over which he had less creative control. (Morris, 2007, p. 176)

Friedman points at masculinity at the heart of Spielberg's films: "Like all of Spielberg's films, *Hook* explores how men struggle to fulfill the cultural expectations of generically masculine roles" (Friedman, 2006, p. 22). Henry Sheehan considers that at the end of the film Peter Banning achieves a "more secure and emotionally open masculinity" (Sheehan, 1992, p. 54). Friedman aptly argues that,

In many ways, this is the goal of almost all of Spielberg's male figures, from the submissive David Mann (*Duel*), to the bullied Clovis (*The Sugarland Express*), to the cowed Brody (*Jaws*), to the beleaguered Neary (*Close Encounters*), to the infantilized Mister (*The Color Purple*), to the dutiful Viktor Navorski (*The Terminal*), to the desperate Ferrier (*War of the Worlds*), to the emotionally stunted Indiana Jones. (Friedman, 2006, pp. 22-23)

This article focuses on what kind of a man is shown in *Hook*, what kind of masculinities are represented in this film.

2. Objectives

The main objective of this research paper is to analyse the way in which masculinities are represented in Steven Spielberg's *Hook* (1991), answering the research question 'what kind of masculinities are represented in *Hook*?'

For reasons of space, we mainly concentrate on Peter Banning/Pan, although we also go through other male characters in the film, mainly in as far as they are related to the main male character.

3. A note on method

Questioning the type of man that is represented in a film involves questioning the ways the different masculinities that appear in the film are portrayed.

This essay attempts to give way to an approach which could be termed as *reconstructive*, since it takes *reconstruction* as the departing point for our analysis of masculinities in *Hook*.

Harry Brod mentions the term in a tentative way when referring to the call for papers for his 1987 anthology on men's studies, where he wanted to study "the best of deconstruction and reconstruction of masculinity emerging from the new men's studies" (Brod, 1987, p. 1). The term has also been used in a more daring way by Jesús González Requena when introducing the first issue of the cultural magazine *Trama y Fondo* in Madrid, where he mentioned "la emergente, aunque difuminada, conciencia de la necesidad de un nuevo paradigma, ya no de la deconstrucción, sino, por el contrario, de la reconstrucción" (González Requena, 1997, p. 109).

In order to analyse the representation of masculinities in *Hook*'s fantasy, we follow Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumim's (1991, p. 12) four so-called *sites* of masculinity in film: the body, action, the external world and the internal world¹. Each of them is flexible enough to be able to comprehend multi-faceted approaches to masculinities.

Kirkham and Thumim's categorisation is not far from Raewyn Connell's four aspects when interviewing Australian men for her book *Masculinities* (Connell, 2001): their bodies, daily experiences, relationships with other people, and desires.

The method we follow is an analytic-synthetic one: first we textually analyse several scenes from the film within each of Kirkham and Thumim's *sites*, and eventually we synthesise them in the conclusion. We contend that it is in the text where we, as spectators and analysts, meet the universal with the specific.

4. Textual analysis and results

In order to textually analyse the masculinities represented in *Hook*, each of Kirkham and Thumim's four sites is considered separately.

All the images quoted from the film have been captured from a Spanish DVD version of the film (which does

¹ We have already applied this method to other film texts directed by Steven Spielberg in Díaz-Cuesta (2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2018a) as well as to films by other directors in Díaz-Cuesta and Asensio Aróstegui (2005) and Díaz-Cuesta, (2018b, 2019).

include the original English-speaking soundtrack of the film, and that is the version we have been considering).

The process of analysis involves the production of partial results which are put together and evaluated in the final conclusion.

4.1. *The body in Hook*

Kirkham and Thumim refer to “the visual representation of the male, to dress, to the spectacle of the male body and the invitation to audience pleasure in this spectacle; we also refer to the actor’s presence, his star persona, as an important element of this material construction” (Kirkham and Thumim, 1993, p. 11).

Hence they combine two elements: on the one hand, the *star persona* of the actors who perform in a film and, on the other, the manner in which their bodies are represented on screen. Owing to this two-fold structure, the analysis of this site usually requires more space and time than the other three ones.

Richard Dyer’s book *Stars*, originally published in 1979 and re-edited in 1998, established the pattern of stardom analysis in Film Studies. Dyer considers that the star icon includes three different levels which are mutually interdependent: stars as signs, stars as images, and stars as a social phenomenon. In the three levels, Dyer defends that “it is assumed that we are dealing with the stars in terms of their signification, not with them as real people” (Dyer, 1998, p. 2). For him, the *semiotics of stars* is understood as “their specific signification as realised in media texts (including films, but also newspaper stories, television programmes, advertisements, etc.)” (Dyer, 1998, p. 1).

Although, owing to reasons of space, we focus mainly on the main male character and the actor who gives him life (Robin Williams), we do make occasional reference to some of the other male characters in so far as they contribute to the construction of masculinities in the film text, specially to such an iconic actor and film star as Dustin Hoffman. As Frederick Wasser puts it, Spielberg was “using such charismatic hams as Robin Williams and Dustin Hoffman” (Wasser, 2010, p. 146).

Robin Williams is Peter Banning/Peter Pan in *Hook*. He first approached an infantile and juvenile audience with the film version of *Popeye* (Altman, 1980), which included real-life actors and actresses, and not cartoons, Williams being cast in the role of Popeye. This early role of Williams set the tone for his subsequent appearances in other films in which his most histrionic side has been sought for. *Good Morning, Vietnam* (Levinson, 1987) meant a quantum leap in Williams’s career, but he still was chosen for his abilities at putting voices. *Dead Poets Society* (Weir, 1989) saw him closer to a dramatic performance than in any of his previous films. These two films, according to Morris, are directly alluded to by *Hook*:

It [*Hook*] alludes also to Williams’ star performances in *Good Morning, Vietnam* (1987) (Smee (Bob Hoskins) addresses the crowds through his megaphone: ‘Good Morning, Neverland!’) and *Dead Poets Society* (1989) ‘Seize the day!’ yells Tootles (Arthur Malet)). (Morris, 2007, p. 181)

Awakenings (Marshall, 1990) touches upon the theme of recovering one’s own past, something that is developed at large in *Hook*. *Mrs. Doubtfire* (Columbus, 1993), a film released after *Hook*, provides Williams with the role of a father impersonating a woman in order to recover his children’s affection.

Williams had always been associated to good humour, intelligence, and, in two words, comedy and happiness. He was the one Spielberg and many friends of the actor’s would phone when they were in a low mood. That was the idea that the common public had until he committed suicide on 11 August 2014. Rewatching *Hook* after Williams killed himself makes us realise how different a person like him can be when compared with his own star persona.

The idea that many of us may have had of Williams without having met him in person is best summarised by the then President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, on his statement on the passing of Williams:

Robin Williams was an airman, a doctor, a genie, a nanny, a president, a professor, a bangarang Peter Pan, and everything in between. But he was one of a kind. He arrived in our lives as an alien – but he ended up touching every element of the human spirit. He made us laugh. He made us cry. He gave his immeasurable talent freely and generously to those who needed it most – from our troops stationed abroad to the marginalized on our own streets. The Obama family offers our condolences to Robin’s family, his friends, and everyone who found their voice and their verse thanks to Robin Williams. (Obama, 2014)

Perhaps the role that was closer to Williams’s troubled mind at the moment of his death may be Parry in *The Fisher King* (Gilliam, 1991), a film that was released the same year as *Hook* and which lets any spectator have a glimpse of the kind of pain that may have led Williams to commit suicide. Williams’s apparently light-hearted public appearances might have been hiding a profound sadness which would be aggravated by the various illnesses he had.

The two kinds of lives that are shown for his character in *Hook*, as Peter Banning and as Peter Pan, would epitomise the representation of the two faces of theatre, with the theatrical mask as symbols of the Greek muses, Thalia (comedy and light verse) and Melpomene (tragedy). Williams was capable of transferring the power of inspiration of both muses to his film performances, interviews and improvisations, and perhaps also to his own personal life.

Furthermore, even before starring in *The Fisher King*, he collaborated with the Comic Relief USA charity, which was founded in 1986. Williams, alongside fellow actors such as Billy Crystal and Whoopi Goldberg, co-hosted the debut fundraiser event which was televised on HBO on March of that same year, and would keep on helping this charity raise fund for homeless people for many years. It does not seem like a mere coincidence that in *the Fisher King* he plays the role of a homeless man.

His legacy as an interpreter and comedian will keep on being a source of inspiration for present and future generations of artists. David Itzkoff approaches the man behind the mask(s) in his biography of Williams:

Some part of him would be present in every role and stand-up set he would play over the next thirty-five years, but in their totality these things did not add up to him. The real Robin was a modest, almost inconspicuous man, who never fully believed he was worthy of the monumental fame, adulation, and accomplishments he would achieve. He shared the authentic person at his core with considerable reluctance, but he also felt obliged to give a sliver of himself to anyone he encountered even fleetingly. It wounded him deeply to think that he had denied a memorable Robin Williams experience to anyone who wanted it, yet the people who spent years by his side were left to feel that he had kept some fundamental part of himself concealed, even from them. (Itzkoff, 2019, p. 4)

Itzkoff points to that part of concealment that is beyond the star persona. Williams's Banning/Pan in *Hook* also undergoes a process of concealment, but of his own true self from himself, as we discuss below.

The other important male role in *Hook* is that of the character who gives his own name to the title of the film, Captain Hook, or simply Hook, performed by Dustin Hoffman. In fact, his name appears before Williams's in the cast.

Hoffman had already proved to be an actor of many talents, but we think that in *Hook* he was chosen for having given life to characters with problems or disabilities, like Ratso in *Midnight Cowboy* (Schlesinger, 1969), the transvestite Michael Dorsey/Dorothy Michaels in *Tootsie* (Pollack, 1982), or the mentally handicapped Raymond Babbitt in *Rain Man* (Levinson, 1988).

As far as his star persona is concerned, it is interesting to note that he has publicly pondered on what being a film star means, for example when he says: "One thing about being successful is that I stopped being afraid of dying. Once you're a star you're dead already. You're embalmed" (Hoffman in IMDb.com). That sense of being dead already may be alluding to the different kind of person you become when you achieve *star* status. And death, and fear of it, is at the core of the construction of the Banning/Pan character. Hoffman has also commented on how age affects stardom, at least his own stardom:

The truth is, the older you get, the less variety of parts you are offered. If you're a star and you've spent most of your career being able to take your pick of the litter, you notice when the offers start to diminish. You're too old to play leads, so you're offered the supporting role - but many stars don't want to make that transition. They see it as a sign of symbolic impotence. And that the audience will no longer regard them as a star. (Hoffman in IMDb.com)

That "symbolic impotence" Hoffman mentions might be related to what Williams was undergoing throughout the latter's last years of life.

Both actors provide *Hook*, the film text, with careers and star personae which were perfectly fit to the performance tasks that Spielberg would demand from them.

Both Hook and Peter Banning compete for the affection of the latter's children, one of them being a boy, Jack, or 'Jackie', impersonated by Charlie Korsmo, who was twelve years old when the film was first released. He had acted in four other films previously, but *Hook* meant his most important role up to that date, after which he left his performing career, except for his appearance in the teenage comedy *Can't Hardly Wait* (Elfont and Kaplan, 1998), which is the last time he has been seen on screen.

As for the presentation of each male body in the film, Peter Banning's first introduction is, apparently, that of a conventional father, attending, together with his wife (Caroline Goodall) and son, a representation of *Peter Pan* in which his daughter Maggie (Amber Scott) plays the part of Wendy as Wendy Moira Angela Darling. He is wearing a suit and needs glasses to see the play correctly. The suit indicates a degree of formality, as well as his relationship with his work, and the glasses, when compared to the moment later on in the film when he does not need them as Peter Pan, point to his being middle aged. The glasses also provide his eyes with some kind of protection from the outside world.

When the whole audience is genuinely enjoying the show, the most representative element of Banning's whole attire makes its entrance: it is his mobile phone, ringing for some issue related to his work, and portraying him as a businessman (the film appeared before the absolute popularization of the mobile phone: an executive's sign of status by 1991).

There is a change of shot, and now Banning appears on the foreground, with his wife inquisitively looking at him. Next we see him in a close-up shot which isolates and individuates him when he agrees to have a meeting the next morning, just at the same time as his son's baseball game.

After a scene at his office that we comment on below, we see Banning on the plane that is taking him over the ocean to London: he is afraid of flying, and appears completely stressed, his safety belt tightly fastened, his suspenders holding his trousers tightly, his tie around his neck. Everything perfectly is tied in order to provide

him with more security and confidence. Once in London, he looks like Mr. Darling in Walt Disney's adaptation of Sir James Matthew Barrie's original work.

After having met Tinkerbell, she transports him like a baby, in a clear indicator that he needs to be born again if he is to return to his former self as Peter Pan. As Patricia Pace has aptly argued:

Spielberg's film is replete with images indicating Banning's imminent rebirth. When Tinkerbell returns him to Neverland, he is transported in a child's blanket like a swaddled babe. His entry into a boy's wonderland is filmically rendered as a veil or membrane opening. Shamefully banished from Hook's ship, Banning is submerged in the ocean, tended by mermaids, then hauled out of the water in a womblike basket, into the honey nest of Tink and the lost boys. (Pace, 2002, p. 161)

Before recovering his identity and appearance as Peter Pan, we see Banning disguised as a pirate. Wendy (Maggie Smith), in relation to the kind of work that he develops, has previously told him that he has become a pirate.

Once he is in touch with the Lost Boys, they make him stand half naked in order to proceed with his transformation into a Peter that can fly, that is, into Peter Pan.

But before that is achieved, Banning's body is ridiculed by the paint that covers his chest.

In the dinner sequence, deprived of his glasses, he looks like any other of the Lost Boys—except for his age.

Robin Williams's abilities to appear in all kinds of guises are present when he disguises as a pirate for the second time in the film. By doing so he is closer to his son, but also closer in appearance to his opponent, Captain Hook.

Banning's reflection on the water as Peter Pan indicates his starting to realise that he really is, or has been, Peter Pan. Pace aptly argues that

Gazing into a pool of water, Banning is confronted with the reflection of a small boy he does not yet recognize. His archetype is, of course, Pan, the "horned god," his forgotten child-self, a modern revision of the primitive ancestor who offers wisdom and guidance. (Pace, 2002, p. 161)

The reflection plays a similar role to Pan's shadow in the original play, showing that Pan can be considered a complex individual. In fact, the shadow, Peter Pan's shadow, appears immediately afterwards.

According to Morris,

As he attempts vainly to fly to Jack, Banning's hair is notably longer and untidier as his transition to Pan – someone who will play with his kids – continues. The baseball striking his head completes the process: reaching into a pool to recover this paternal token, he sees the child Pan's reflection, a Mirror Phase that flickers light onto his face. Now separated from his beckoning shadow, he becomes spectator and follower of his more powerful, more complete self, identifying with a projected form (Morris, 2007, p. 189).

When Peter starts to remember, he is shown as a baby in a pram (using a baby actor, Max Hoffman) in a flashback of the moment he escaped from his mother. Tinkerbell carries him like the baby he is, for the second, or, chronologically, first time in the story. Another actor, Ryan Francis, is needed to account for Peter's love/friendship story with Wendy and eventually with her granddaughter and Peter's wife-to-be, Moira. Banning's happy thought allows him to fly and be dressed and made up as Peter Pan, an appearance that is only complete when one of the boys conditions his hair and face.

As for Captain Hook, the first thing any spectator can envisage as belonging or representing him is the hook-shaped window lock at the children's room in London. Then it will be one of his swords, used to hold his kidnap notice to the door in the children's bedroom, that stands for the Captain. Both hook and sword are phallic signifiers² which attempt to put him in the place of the father, a position he tries to achieve throughout the rest of the film with Peter's children, specially with his son. Hook's and Peter's bodies undergo opposed evolutions.

As we have seen, Peter is capable of becoming or looking younger than he actually is. Of Hook we know, especially at the end, that he has become an old man who has gone bald: someone who has grown up in Neverland.

Jack, or 'Jackie', Peter's son, is metonymically represented by his baseball, as we have already seen when considering Peter's first appearance. The day afterwards he is playing baseball, fully fit for the sport. Perhaps the most astounding example of his evolution within the film can be observed when he is dressed like Captain Hook Jr.: the only element missing in his attire is the hook, which is going to be given to him by the Captain in the form of a hook-shaped earring.

For that purpose his ear needs to be pierced, and the Captain seems to be about to do so with his own hook. Pan/Banning, or, in other words, Jack's real father, will prevent that from happening. At the end, Jack is back to basics, wearing his baseball costume again. He is back where he belongs, as Peter Banning's son.

2 We agree with Andrew Gordon when he defends that "Hook's prosthetic hand, his hook, is both a weapon and a sort of detachable phallus" (Gordon, 2008, p. 195). Furthermore, we may also consider Morris's opinion about Hook, "whose missing hand and its steel replacement conflate both the fact and the threat of castration" (Morris, 2007, p. 180). Hook's castration will mean his eventual disappearance, as he is finally engulfed by the same crocodile that had previously eaten his missing hand.

4.2. Action in Hook

By *action* Kirkham and Thumim mean “various representations of the physical, including violence, competition, aggression, skill and endurance, in which these attributes are depicted in terms of the male body in action” (Kirkham and Thumim, 1993, p. 12). Throughout the film we can also find “chivalrous deeds, sports, combat and violence, with an emphasis on competition” (Kirkham and Thumim, 1993, p. 15).

The two first sports spectators witness in *Hook* appear in parallel editing, Jack being unable to catch a baseball during an important match, his father successfully playing a game of drawing his mobile phone against one of his work mates as if they were having a duel. They have previously placed their mobile phone into holders that very much resemble gun holsters. What is underlined here is the fact that Peter is behaving in a childish manner³ when he should be supporting his own son, whose age is more suitable for playing games. This may indicate a lack of coherence in portraying Peter, as the spectator may gather the wrong impression from this juvenile attitude of his. Nevertheless, as we know, Peter will have to regain his inner child in order to save his children later on in the film.

The most violent confrontations occur between Peter and Hook. In fact, the pirate wants a war, whereas at first Banning tries to solve the conflict by drawing his cheque book. Hook's answer is to perforate Banning's book with a bullet shot from the pirate's gun⁴. Immediately afterwards, as Pace puts it, Banning is “too weak and afraid to scale the phallic mast in order to meet his archetype” (Pace, 2002, p. 161). Banning is not yet ready for the battle that Hook is demanding. This is not at all new in Spielberg: the same can be said of his very first film, *Duel* (Spielberg, 1972), where David Mann (Dennis Weaver) has to evolve towards an aggressive and competitive attitude⁵ in order to subdue the lorry/driver.

Banning's third opponent, after his work mate and Hook, is Rufio. He is the leader of the Lost Boys, and all of them fight Banning the lawyer. As Morris aptly argues, “[c]ompetition between Banning and Rufio, who announces, ‘I got Pan's sword. I'm the Pan now’, dramatises the Oedipal struggle for authority, here compounded with the search for a worthy father” (Morris, 2007, p. 187). However it will be one of the youngest Lost Boys, after having been advised by Tinkerbell, that performs the first action that makes Peter look more like Pan rather than like Banning, in one of the most eloquent moments of the film. Peter's face and hair are literally re-sculptured by the Lost Boy: “Oh, there you are, Peter!” he says. Peter cannot recall his past yet, but most of the Lost Boys do recognise him now, one of them accusing him of having grown up. That is another action that Peter has done, against his own old promises of never going to grow up.

Some of the subsequent scenes are devoted to Peter's “training for action” towards “the acquisition of survival skills” (Kirkham and Thumim, 1993, p. 15). What is sought for is Peter Pan, the eternal child. Banning does not go back in time, but he does manage to behave as if he were two decades younger at the very least, as we have seen when analysing the body.

The final battle between the Lost Boys and the pirates happens on board (there had been a previous baseball game with Jack as its star, but now they are on Hook's ship). Although the Lost Boys carry swords like the pirates, the children also use home made weapons which recall the sense of game without blood of traditional versions of Peter Pan's tale.

There may be no blood, but the confrontation involves Hook's killing of Rufio, the first death that we feel as such in the whole film, and which might be received as not belonging to the story. When the time comes, Peter shows mercy for the Captain.

4.3. The external world in Hook

The “representations of the public interaction of male characters with each other and with the conventions and institutions against which they operate” constitute the external world of masculinity for Kirkham and Thumim (1993, p. 12). This type of protagonist moves away from fiction and reality in equal parts, since Spielberg does not focus on the fantastic traits or on the characterization of the protagonist's daily reality, in the style of Italian neorealism, of which Spielberg finds himself far away (Caldevilla-Domínguez, 2009).

In *Hook*, Spielberg focuses his and our attention on one institution, the family, and on the role the father plays within it. As Pace aptly argues,

For Spielberg in particular, the conflict between emotionality, empathy, idealism (associated with the feminine and the private sphere), and the mythic individualism central to patriarchal man, finds its imaginative locus in the contemporary family. (Pace, 2002, p. 160)

According to Andrew Gordon, “Like *Last Crusade* and *Always, Hook* (1991) continues Spielberg's concern with converting louts into “new age sensitive guys” who are fit to be fathers” (Gordon, 2008, p. 183). For this Spielberg academic, *Hook* is “yet another of Spielberg's moral fables about lost children and failed fathers” (p. 183).

Before and/or together with being a father, Peter Banning is a husband. The film devotes little time to exploring the relationship between husband and wife. We agree with Gordon when he states that “[t]heir romance is limited

3 He is wearing a baseball cap which ridicules him in the context of the office and reminds the viewer that he is missing his son's game.

4 One of the innocent pirates is shot as a collateral effect of Hook's action.

5 See Díaz-Cuesta (2010) for an exploration into the evolution of David Mann in *Duel*.

to a kiss when they first meet as children and another when they reconcile at the end of the film” (Gordon, 2008, p. 198).

Peter does kiss other women figures, or at least is kissed by them. We are referring to the mermaids who kiss him in order to rescue him from the water, and also to the moment when Tinkerbell is shown as a normal-size adult woman. As Gordon puts it,

Tink’s transformation recalls similar scenes in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Always* when the tomboy, pants-wearing heroine suddenly appears as a sexy woman in an evening gown, surprising and awing the boys. Such scenes seem like adolescent male fantasies. (Gordon, 2008, p. 201)

These may be adolescent male fantasies for the male viewer, but we must remember that Peter Banning is a married man with two children. He may be enjoying at those moments what he had not had previously, but he is not behaving like a dutiful husband. This is one of the reasons to consider this film not very moralising for children. As Gordon aptly argues, “Rather than being about children like *Peter Pan*, *Hook* is much more concerned with adult male identity and with the problems of contemporary American men (and of Spielberg) as businessmen, husbands, and fathers” (Gordon, 2008, p. 183).

Even more striking, although constituting a side effect of Barry’s story, is the relationship between Peter and the old Wendy. Their story is very cleverly summarised, but eventually, “[t]o see the ninety-year-old Wendy behave like a jilted lover toward the forty-year-old Banning makes both the hero and the audience uncomfortable” (Gordon, 2008, p. 193). We agree with Michel Le Gall and Charles Taliaferro when they affirm that “*Hook* further suggests that, in the absence of parents, children are deprived of the joys and fantasies of childhood—something we all need for our own sanity and happiness” (Le Gall and Taliaferro, 2008, p. 48).

The key element of Peter’s external world in this film is his relationship with his children, specially with his son. Unlike his younger sister, Jack has grown enough so as not to believe his father’s promises. “My word is my bond,” repeats Peter Banning at the beginning of the film. But his actions demonstrate that he belongs in the long list of missing American fathers at their children’s big game/day in all kinds of film texts. As Friedman puts it, “Peter commits one of the cardinal sins within Spielberg’s world: he ignores his children, talking on his cell phone throughout Maggie’s (Amber Scott) school play and sending an office flunky to videotape Jack’s baseball game” (Friedman, 2006, pp. 18-19). He is reminded by his wife that the children will only be a few years around them as such, as children.

The note that Hook leaves on the children’s bedroom says: “Dear Peter: Your presence is required at the request of your children.” The pirate’s message is a two-fold one: on the one hand he wants Peter to go back to Neverland, on the other he is calling for what Michael Kimmel has named ‘quantity time’:

What steps are we taking to become better fathers? At best, men say they ‘help out’ around the house, that they ‘pitch in’ with the housework, and that they spend ‘quality time’ with their children. But it is not ‘quality time’ that will provide the deep intimate relationships that we say we want, either with our partners or with our children. It is ‘quantity time’ –putting in those long, hard hours of thankless, unnoticed drudge work. It is ‘quantity time’ that creates the foundation of intimacy. Nurture is doing the unheralded tasks, like holding someone when they are sick, doing the laundry, the ironing, washing the dishes. Nurturing is putting in those hours, unseen, uncelebrated. (Kimmel, 1996, p. 49)

Cinemasgoers would have to wait until *Jurassic Park* (Spielberg, 1993a) and specially until *War of the Worlds* (Spielberg, 2005), to see Spielberg’s men spending both *quality* and *quantity time* with children. As Gordon puts it, “*Hook* seems to me not so much novel as trendy, reflecting the changing views of manhood of the American men’s movement of the 1980s and 1990s and the more nurturing model of manhood, both new ways to shore up a crumbling patriarchy” (Gordon, 2008, p. 188).

Spielberg himself has pointed to that missing time in an interview given to Ana Maria Bahiana:

I think a lot of people today are losing their imagination because they are work-driven. They are so self-involved with work and success and arriving at the next plateau that children and family almost become incidental. I have seen this happen to friends of mine. I have experienced it myself when I have been on a very tough shot and I’ve not seen my kids except on weekends. They ask for my time and I can’t give it to them because I’m working. And I’ve been both guilty and wanting to do something about that. (Spielberg in Bahiana, 1992, p. 16)

Something similar may be said of Spielberg’s semi-autobiographical *The Fabelmans* (Spielberg, 2022). That missing time of Burt Fabelman with his own children, and more specifically with the director’s alter ego in that film, Sammy Fabelman (Gabriel LaBelle), is present—or absent—throughout most of the film. We agree with Nick Prigge when he states: “If “*Hook*” is sometimes considered Steven Spielberg’s midlife crisis movie th[e]n “*The Fabelmans*,” thirty-one years later, is a septuagenarian reflection, a potent personal mythology” (Prigge, 2003, para 1). It is not the aim of this paper to draw a parallelism between both films, but it is worth noting that many of his films, with *Hook* in a prominent position, will have to be reconsidered and re-analysed in the light of *The Fabelmans*.

Captain Hook also performs the role of the bad father and makes the parents in the audience hesitate about their own status quo as parents, in comparison to their former life without children. He tells Peter’s children

about their parents: “They tell you stories to shut you up,” and eventually adds: “Before you were born they were happier and freer.”

The happy thought Peter chooses in order to recover his flying abilities is to remember his son when Jack was just a baby born and Peter was holding him in his arms. This choice indicates his maturation as a father, even though he will have to fight like a child in order to recover his children.

As Morris aptly argues, “[t]o protect his children he thinks and behaves childishly. Thus the narrative occupies the boundary between Symbolic (duty, positioning) and Imaginary (freedom, inconsequentiality) – alternating, as does entertainment film spectatorship” (Morris, 2007, p. 189).

Peter becomes a better father by feeling again like a boy, and, consequently, by empathising with his own children. Complementarily, Jack’s happy thought is “My father, Peter Pan.”

Molly Haskell affirms that “[i]f *Las Crusade* was an act of “regression,” *Hook* is a film *about* regression, meant to utilize the insights into his own infantilism that the director had gleaned from the analyst’s couch” (Haskell, 2017, p. 134). The evolution of the Pan/Banning character reflects the point at which this film is located within Spielberg’s career, immediately before *Schindler’s List* (Spielberg, 1993b).

As Joseph McBride aptly argues, “the movie actually seems to be saying [...] that Peter needs to get his infantile tendencies out of his system for once and for all, through this one last monumental effort of regression before he can go back to his family and behave like a *mesch*” (McBride, 2010, p. 412).

Haskell points to the director’s evolution when summing up what *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (Spielberg, 1989a), *Always* (Spielberg, 1989b) and *Hook* meant before being fully involved in the pre-production of *Schindler’s List* (Spielberg, 1993b):

A more reliable division in Spielberg’s oeuvre is between the winningly benevolent take on the world in his signature films, and a warped and subversive perspective in the films he produced. But even his own films were becoming increasingly chiaroscuro, blending light and shadow. At the same time, he was as incapable of forgoing the instincts of a showman as he was of skirting what he saw as his responsibilities as a teacher and moralist. (Haskell, 2017, p. 137)

We think that *Hook* plays a pivotal role between those two sides of Spielberg’s career, and needs to be considered under both lights: as entertainment, but also as an approach to fatherhood by someone who is more and more preoccupied by the position and occupation of fathers in the family.

4.4. The internal world in Hook

Kirkham and Thumim’s internal world is represented by “the experience and articulation of being, from the inside, as it were” (Kirkham and Thumim, 1993, p. 12). There are two main fears that the main protagonist has to face, apart from being afraid of losing his children: fear of flying and fear of death. Overcoming those fears allows Peter to be at one with his own past and future.

Flying is an action we have purposely omitted from our list of actions, because we have preferred to consider it as a two-fold sign of Peter’s inner self: a sign of fear but also of desire. The first part of the film shows a Peter Banning that is afraid of flight. As Gordon aptly argues:

When Spielberg mentions that he is “aware of the psychoanalytic implications of flight,” he probably alludes to the well-known Freudian notion that dreams of flying have a thinly disguised erotic content. A fear of flying would therefore suggest a fear of sexuality. (Gordon, 2008, p. 191)

The film confirms this theory, as Peter is kissed by Tinkerbell only once he has been able to fly again. His eventual desire to fly is linked to his desire for women, or at least for the desire he inspires on one of them.

As for the fear of death, in the film it is initially linked to the fear of flight, since Peter Banning is afraid of flying by plane because he thinks it may be his time to go —or the pilot’s. Dying in a metaphorical sense is also alluded to by the baseball coach in the scene that is shown in parallel editing together with Peter’s allusion to his fear of flight: “Come on, keep us alive, Banning! Keep us alive!” shouts Jack’s coach.

Fear of dying is the ultimate reason why, according to Peter’s recollection of his early days, he did not want to grow up in the past, “because everybody who grows up has to die someday,” he says. Spielberg’s *mise en scène* for this flashback includes an autumn tree with brown leaves being blown by the wind as a metaphor for death. Wendy’s age is another reminder of the proximity of death.

Although several pirates fall apparently dead throughout the whole film, it is Rufio’s death that may be more pungently received by the audience. We do not agree with Friedman when he states that

Ironically for a film ostensibly concerned with eternal childhood and directed by a man most critics attack as a perpetual adolescent, Spielberg stuffs *Hook* with a startling amount of talk about dying; it even portrays the death of a child, Rufio (Dante Basco), a rare moment in Spielberg’s work that actualizes his worst fears. (Friedman, 2006, p. 21)

Richard Schickel also observes that “[t]he film is also surprisingly death-obsessed” (Schickel, 2012, p. 142).

Yet the moment is not rare in Spielberg at all: we see Elliott (Henry Thomas) being close to death in *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (Spielberg, 1982), a Japanese boy dies in *Empire of the Sun* (1987) in spite of Jim’s (Christian

Bale) attempt at resuscitating him, the most important icon of *Schindler's List* (1993b) is the girl in red who is eventually found dead, the death of a boy is an important element in the plot of *Jaws* (1975), Tim (Joseph Mazzello) is resuscitated by Dr Alan Grant in *Jurassic Park* (1993a), and the boy robot finds peace when he closes his eyes at the end of *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001).

Therefore, the theme is not strange but common, even central in Spielberg's career. Hence Rufio's death is an important moment in the film, a moment chosen to highlight Peter's fatherhood, since Rufio's last words are "I wish I had a dad like you."

Rufio has been Peter Pan's substitute while Peter was away, and his death anticipates Peter's decision to leave Neverland with his children. Therefore he renounces to being Peter Pan and accepts death as the end of life.

There is yet another death that deserves some mentioning: we are referring to Hook's. He makes a fake suicide attempt and finally disappears into the crocodile's body. With his vanishing there is no space left for the bad father, and both the Lost Boys and Peter's children have no longer an adult to be afraid of.

At the end Peter accepts death and its antecedent, real life. The final sentence of the film paraphrases Pan's in the original story "To die would be an awfully big adventure," which did not regard dying as something that might really happen to him.

By saying "To live, to live would be an awfully big adventure," Peter Banning/Pan accepts both life and death as part of his existence.

5. Conclusion

The masculinity of Peter Banning/Peter Pan in *Hook* is conditioned by his role as a father, and Captain Hook is set as an example of the bad father.

According to Schickel, Spielberg "has somewhat come to terms with the movie" (Schickel, 2012, p. 143), after having disregarded it. Schickel also points to some of the key moments in the film: "His [Spielberg's] children have taught him to like it [*Hook*], especially (and correctly) the domestic sequences, where Robin Williams is struggling to become an ideal dad" (Schickel, 2012, p. 143).

By hiring two iconic actors in the male leading roles Spielberg was combining the talents of two charismatic performers (Wasser, 2010, p. 146) who provide their roles with the traces of their most iconic previous characters and their own star personae.

We disagree with Gordon when he states that "Hook was a misstep. Under the guise of updating *Peter Pan*, Spielberg constructed instead an uncomfortable psychodrama about his lost childhood and his midlife crisis as grownup and parent" (Gordon, 2008, p. 200). The Spielberg academic adds: "*Hook* is about a father who wants to rediscover his "inner child," which is something else entirely, and not the stuff of great children's literature" (p. 200).

Hook is not literature but film and it is neither aimed at children, or at least not only at children. We think that an important part of the target audience of this film are fathers who want to be at one with their children, spending both quality and quantity time with them, perhaps watching a film like *Hook* with them, but not using *Hook* as a babysitter. *Hook* would be more of a family film than a children-only film, with fathers at the core of its nucleus.

Some may argue, like Gordon, that those fathers, like Peter Banning in *Hook*, undergo "a midlife crisis," others may think, like us, that those fathers are simply growing up, attempting to accept that at the end death is waiting for all of them. But before getting to that final point of our lives, our bodies, our actions, our external world and our internal world have to go, if possible, through all the steps, including those Banning takes in this film. We can conclude by saying that fatherhood as a marker of masculinity in *Hook* is taken much more seriously than it may look at first sight.

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A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE MASCULINITIES PORTRAYED IN HOOK (STEVEN SPIELBERG, 1991)

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