Chapter 1.
Developing *Peter Pan* for performance.

Peter Pan is frequently associated with the field of children's literature; it is often defined as a work for children, and as influential upon subsequent writing aimed at young readers. However, the play was created for a cross-generational audience; four years before the play premiered, an early biography of Barrie included a chapter titled 'His Knowledge Of Boys':

> It is one thing to be able to write books for boys, and another thing to be able to write books about boys. The art of pleasing the youthful reader of fiction is a comparatively easy one, but the art of entrancing adult readers with the story of a boy is given only to the few.[1]

Early reviews of *Peter Pan* also note that Barrie's depiction of childhood had appeal to an adult readership:

> The whole play must be treated as a fanciful extravaganza, written and constructed for the amusement of children, and yet there are passages in it which are worthy of Mr Barrie at his best. The piece is full of hits at social foibles and conventions which children will hardly appreciate, but which their elders will greatly relish.[2]

The desire to reach a cross-generational audience is certainly evident in the published play, where extensive directions signal the efforts of the playwright to create material that was immediate for an adult audience, alongside the playful content designed to engage younger viewers. For example, the characteristics to be embodied and presented by the actor playing Mr. Darling, on his first entrance:

> Mr. Darling […] is really a good man as bread-winners go, and it is hard luck for him to be propelled into the room now, when if we had brought him in a few minutes earlier or later he might have made a fairer impression. In the City, where he sits on a stool all day, as fixed as a postage stamp, he is so like all the others on stools that you

> recognise him not by his face but by his stool, but at home the way to gratify him is to say he has a distinct personality.'[3]

The reflection upon a stultifying middle-class workplace included here by Barrie could not, of course, be represented explicitly on stage, but it is evocative for an actor, and for the reader, of a particular kind of professional 'bread-winner' that would certainly be present in the 1904 audience. The implication is that the actor playing Mr. Darling should communicate, through his desire for status and respect within the household, the absence of those qualities beyond that arena. Dialogue does help to communicate this also, as in the following exchange between the character and Nana, the Newfoundland dog who is nanny to the Darling children:

> MR DARLING: Am I master in this house or is she? (*To Nana fiercely*) Come along. (*He thunders at her, but she indicates that she has reasons not worth troubling him with for remaining where she is. He resorts to a false bonhomie*) There, there, did she think he was angry with her, poor Nana? (*She wriggles a response in the affirmative*) Good Nana, pretty Nana. (*She has seldom been called pretty, and it has the old effect. She plays rub-a-dub with her paws, which is how a dog blushes*) She will come to her kind master won't she? won't she? (*She advances, retreats, waggles her head, her tail, and eventually goes to him. He seizes her collar in an iron grip and amid the cries of his progeny drags her from the room. They listen, for her remonstrances are not inaudible*)[4]

It is, of course, absurd that the animal is acting as nanny, but this section also foregrounds the absurdity of Mr. Darling's efforts at authority. Barrie wants to emphasise that Mr. Darling should evoke the idea of an inadequate and an unsatisfactory adult life; this is both comic material and evocative of anxieties around authority and status that would be familiar to significant numbers in the West End audience. The play appeals to older audiences through its confrontation of the impermanence of childhood as well as the disappointing nature of adult experience; as Carol Mavor states it is the story of 'a sweet soufflé before the time of its fall'.[5] This precise form of drama created by Barrie, communicating with a cross-generational audience but focusing upon the experiences and perspectives of children, can be more fully examined through looking at the origins of the play and the influences upon its composition.

Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens, and after.

'There is no definitive text of *Peter Pan* but there *is* a textual history.'[6] Here, Donna R. White and C. Anita Tarr identify the difficulty in confirming where Peter began; it is possible to expand upon their assertion to note that textual origins are not the only consideration, since the character and his imagined worlds began in the play and the storytelling undertaken by Barrie with the Llewellyn Davies boys in Kensington Gardens. An early textual version was privately printed in 1901; *The Boy Castaways of Black Lake Island* was an adventure story produced as a record of summertime games when Barrie and the Llewellyn Davies family holidayed together in Surrey. Only two copies were ever printed, but passages do parallel the story of Peter Pan that is present in the play. Then in 1902 a novel for adults, *The Little White Bird*, was published, recounting the relationship between the narrator and a couple with one young son. Within the novel, Barrie presents the story of a baby who flew out of his nursery, called Peter Pan. It is here that one characteristic feature of the stage play has its origins; aerial manoeuvres on stage developed from references to flight in this earlier prose version. Barrie uses flight in the novel to argue that the freedom found in infancy and childhood hold all the promise of a bird's flight, but are curtailed by adult expectations which manifest in, for example, the bars placed on nursery windows. This idea is retained within the published version of the play, most explicitly in the final confrontation between Peter and Hook in Act 5, Scene 1:

> HOOK 'Tis some fiend fighting me! Pan, who and what art thou?
> (*The children listen eagerly for the answer, none quite so eagerly as Wendy*)
> PETER (*at a venture*) I'm youth, I'm joy, I'm a little bird that has broken out of the egg.
> HOOK To't again!
> (*He has now a damp feeling that this boy is the weapon which is to strike him form the lists of man; but the grandeur of his mind still holds and, true to the traditions of his flag, he fights on like a human flail. Peter flutters round and through and over these gyrations as if the wind of them blew him out of the danger zone, and again he darts in and jags*)[7]

Peter Pan was staged just two years after *The Little White Bird* was published, and there is a clear relationship between prose and play. However, the play itself continued to evolve each

year until Barrie's death in 1937, the author adapting and revising his text for professional presentation.

The play premiered on Broadway in 1905 and the commercial success of the London and New York productions also resulted in further prose versions of the story. In 1906, the Peter Pan chapters from *The Little White Bird* were published as *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, with illustrations by Arthur Rackham. Then in 1911 came the novelisation *Peter and Wendy*; this version is very often thought to be the definitive version of the Peter Pan tale but, Barrie's persistent revisions to the play text suggest that he was most committed to the story in performance.

Given these multiple early renderings of *Peter Pan*, it is worth outlining the story that is presented within the most definitive dramatic version that we have, the first published play text of 1928. Within this text, there are lengthy prose introductions to each scene accompanying stage directions and dialogue, indicating Barrie's desire to prescribe how the worlds he created within the play should be understood by readers and audiences. The opening act and much of the closing scene take place in the nursery of the Darling house in Bloomsbury, London. The three Darling children - Wendy, John and Michael - meet Peter in this room, depart with him for Never Land, and then, at the opening of Act 5 Scene 2, are returned to their nursery. Although extensive stage directions imply that realism is present through the detail of the nursery scenes, absurd elements such as the Newfoundland dog Nana performing the actions of a nanny immediately resist straightforward dramatic realism.

A contrast between imagined ideals and material reality lies at the heart both of the play, and the character of Peter, and for Barrie this was embodied through the juxtaposition of fine stage detail and fantastical action. Barrie criticised efforts to show character and environment on stage as familiar, stable entities that could adequately present the experiences of the individual. In 1891, he wrote in disapproval of drama that demonstrated this kind of effort, stating that 'to conceive of the Ibsen Drama gaining an extensive or permanent foothold on the stage is hardly possible'.[8] His response to promotion of Ibsen and his drama in the final decades of the nineteenth century had been the burlesque *Ibsen's Ghost*, produced at Toole's Theatre in London in 1891. A dramatist who could conceive of many, varied, fantastical worlds could not countenance what he perceived to be a rigid form of naturalism. Although it is hard to picture the history of European theatre without the influence of Ibsen, to Barrie,

drama without the competing demands of lived experience and imagined alternatives was unsatisfactory.

Barrie does however insist in the opening stage directions to *Peter Pan* that precision and rigour are to be employed in depicting even the most absurd elements within his play:

> The cuckoo clock strikes six, and Nana springs into life. This first moment in the play is tremendously important, for if the actor playing Nana does not spring properly we are undone. She will probably be played by a boy, if one clever enough can be found, and must never be on two legs except on those rare occasions when an ordinary nurse would be on four. This Nana must go about all her duties in a most ordinary manner, so that you know in your bones she performs them just so every evening at six; naturalness must be her passion; indeed, it should be the aim of every one in the play, for which she is now setting the pace.[9]

Therefore, the traits of a familiar, contemporary world are usurped by intricate details that confirm, for the audience, that real and imagined worlds co-exist within his play. In the final pages of the 1928 text, the action moves away from the nursery to show that although the Darling children did return home, Wendy continues to visit Never Land; this is Barrie's appeal for us to prize imagined worlds, despite our necessary existence in the real and tangible spaces we inhabit day to day beyond the theatre space.

The rest of the play is situated in Never Land, an environment that Barrie makes particular to Peter, but that is to be associated with the imaginative faculties of each individual encountering the play. This is made explicit in the published opening directions for Act 2:

> What you see is the Never Land. You have often half seen it before, or even three-quarters, after the night-lights were lit, and you might then have beached your coracle on it if you had not always at the great moment fallen asleep. I dare say you have chucked things on to it, the things you can't find in the morning.[10]

Events within this Never Land environment are particular 'things', dream-like set pieces that aim to prompt the imaginative faculty in spectators. While the play has a structure informed by the evolving relationship between Peter and Wendy, and the ongoing combat between

Peter and Hook, each scene could be presented in isolation and would work as a set piece, and so Never Land is less an island and more an abstract environment where scenes from the imagination are made tangible:

> **Act 2:** Peter returns to Never Land with Wendy, who immediately takes on the role of mother to all of the lost boys. The idea of Never Land being an island of competing factions is promoted, as Hook and his crew, the pursuit of Hook by a crocodile that may be identified by the ticking of a clock it has swallowed, and a First Nations community, are introduced.
>
> **Act 3:** Peter and Wendy are confronted by Hook at the Mermaids' Lagoon; Peter facilitates Wendy's escape and is prepared to drown, before he is saved by sailing away in a bird's nest.
>
> **Act 4:** The house under the ground inhabited by Peter, the Darling children, and the Lost Boys, is shown and Wendy remains pivotal in caring for the large group of children. Above ground, the audience can see a battle between First Nations characters and Hook's band of pirates, and then as all of the children set out to leave Never Land (without Peter), they are abducted by Hook, who sneaks in to the house and attempts to poison the sleeping Peter. Tinker Bell drinks the poison to save Peter.
>
> **Act 5 Scene 1:** Peter boards the pirate ship to save the children, and fights Hook, who finally admits defeat and succumbs to the waiting crocodile.

The ends to Acts 3 and 4 are notable for producing the two most celebrated details of the play. It is when Peter confronts his imminent demise at the end of Act 3 that states: 'To die will be an awfully big adventure'.[11] Then, the end of Act 4 requires the actor or actress playing Peter to engage in direct address with the audience:

> PETER […] She says – she says she thinks she could get well again if children believed in fairies! (*He rises and throws out his arms he knows not to whom, perhaps to the boys and girls of whom he is not one*) Do you believe in fairies? Say quick that you believe! If you believe, clap your hands![12]

The confrontation of mortality forges some sense of connection between the scenes set in Never Land, as the revival of Tinker Bell follows the attitude to death found in the preceding scene. However, it is at the end of Act 5 Scene 1, just before all the children return to the Darling nursery, that Barrie presents the audience with what must happen between life and death: maturity. After defeating Hook, Peter is presented in a final tableau:

> *The curtain rises to show Peter a very Napoleon on his ship. It must not rise again lest we see him on the poop in Hook's hat and cigars, and with a small iron claw [.]*[13]

Therefore, after Never Land is introduced in Act 2, the rest of the time spent in that environment is used to present the audience not just with children at play, but children playing at the different stages of life they will encounter. Although *Peter Pan* is often read as Barrie's resistance to maturity and to leaving behind childhood, it operates to some extent as a meditation on the necessity of that process. This more serious consideration of progress through life is contained with dynamic family entertainment however, and it will be helpful to consider some forms of theatre utilised by Barrie, as he reworked Peter's story and his own preoccupation with mortality for the stage.

What kind of play is *Peter Pan*?

Both the 1928 play text and reviews of initial productions provide evidence of Barrie working to create theatre from the stories developed for the Llewellyn Davies boys. However, even though the play is based to some extent upon his personal experience, it is also shaped and defined by its role as a piece of seasonal entertainment. In reviewing the premiere, the critic for the *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* noted it was characteristic work by Barrie, stating that as a dramatist 'while he is always himself, he is never the same', and in this case the result is that 'Barrie has suddenly bethought himself that he would like to write a Christmas play' which is 'a typical production of the Barrie genius, with all the Barrie humour, the Barrie whimsicality, and the Barrie sentiment'.[14] Therefore, *Peter Pan* is both characteristic of its author and particular to the season. More specifically, *Peter Pan* as we know it is influenced by its affiliation to the British pantomime tradition.

Pantomime is now a diverse form; as Millie Taylor has identified, it falls in to four categories: Commercial, Repertory, Alternative, Amateur.[15] These different types have been

propelled by developments throughout the twentieth century, including the foundation of regional repertory theatres, amateur theatre movements of the interwar years, the emergence of subsidised theatre after the Second World War, and fringe theatre work within and beyond London. Barrie's experience of pantomime as an audience member came before these developments however, and *Peter Pan* is influenced by the form and content of professional London pantomime as it was in the final decades of the nineteenth century.

It is possible to chart the origins of this kind of pantomime performance in the mime work of Ancient Greek and Roman theatre and the Italian Renaissance *Commedia dell'arte* tradition. Characters developed within *Commedia* who worked their way into pantomime include the lovers Harlequin and Columbine, the clown Pierrot, and the skinflint Pantaloon. London theatre manager John Rich is acknowledged as importing elements of the *Commedia* tradition and establishing the Harlequinade performance in 1716 to promote his own mime and movement work in the Harlequin role; this was the earliest form of English pantomime. Initially, pantomime retold familiar stories from classical antiquity but by the middle of the nineteenth century European fairy tale narratives were favoured, and pantomime had become a Christmas entertainment. At this stage, elements still found in pantomime today were making an appearance, particularly the characters of the Dame and the Principal Boy, roles requiring cross-gender casting.

One reason for the popularity of these cross-gender performances by the middle of the nineteenth century was the influence of burlesque - then a very popular form of theatre - upon Christmas pantomime tradition. Nineteenth-century burlesque satirised contemporary events, individuals, and pre-existing cultural products, and titles of mid-century pantomimes suggest how fairy tale and contemporary reference were being conjoined in pantomimes influenced by the burlesque tradition. For example, *Jack and the Beanstalk; or, Harlequin Leap-Year, and the Merry Pranks of the Good Little People*, performed at Drury Lane, London, in 1859, makes reference to fairy tale, *Commedia*, and a contemporary preoccupation with the coming leap year. Burlesque also often included actresses in 'breeches roles', in other words, dressed as male characters. Therefore, the Harlequin character becomes the Principal Boy character, performed by a woman in what is recognisably male attire. While pantomime has altered over time, the combination of music, movement, spectacle, and the telling of familiar tales through discrete set piece scenes has survived to this day, and was evident in the pantomimes Barrie would have seen in the final decades of the nineteenth century.

This summary of pantomime tradition and history indicates the extent to which *Peter Pan* is influenced by the form. For example, the characters of Peter and Wendy echo the Harlequin (latterly Principal Boy) and Columbine (latterly Principal Girl) figures. The Harlequin character is most often conveyed as a trickster, a quality evident in the behaviour of Peter, while Columbine often out-tricks Harlequin, and this is echoed by Wendy in her ultimate command of events. For example in the opening act of the play she gains the upper hand in negotiations with Peter, promising him more stories only if her brothers can accompany them to Never Land.

Casting a woman as Peter, usual practice until the RSC's 1982 production of the play, further emphasises the relationship to pantomime tradition. Other elements in Barrie's work that adhere to that tradition include the 'skin parts' - actors impersonating animals, playing both Nana and the crocodile that pursues Hook - and the misanthropic qualities of Hook, echoing the skinflint Pantaloon from *Commedia* tradition and his afterlife in pantomime characters like Baron Hardup (*Cinderella*). Direct appeal to the audience - 'Do you believe in fairies?' - also reflects the influence of the popular seasonal entertainment upon evolution of the play.

Significantly, however, while *Peter Pan* was conceived as a piece for Christmas time, and drew on pantomime practice, it was never categorised *as* pantomime. Early reviews recognised the parallels, the *Edinburgh Evening News* defining the play as 'a medley of farce, of fairy tale, and pantomime'.[16] However, in many ways it does not comply with pantomime convention. There is no true Dame figure, and there are scenes locating the Darling household in the recognisable, contemporary world of Edwardian London, resisting definition of the play simply as a new pantomime tale. *Peter Pan* was, rather, one example of alternatives to the pantomime found on West End stages by the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1901, Barrie took the Llewellyn Davies boys to see a new production, *Bluebell in Fairy Land*:

> A very dainty and charming children's play was produced at the Vaudeville Theatre yesterday afternoon, in the shape of *Bluebell in Fairyland*, which is officially described as "A Musical Dream Play in Two Acts." In his libretto Mr. Seymour Hicks has dealt with an excursion of a flower girl, Bluebell, into fairyland to wake and

> reform the sleeping King, who, as a punishment for his many crimes, has been doomed to sleep away 300 years in a particularly forbidding underground cavern.[17]

As this review in the *Times* notes, the play was framed as 'Dream' rather than pantomime, and the initial description indicates that, like *Peter Pan*, the play conjoined contemporary and fairy tale worlds. *Bluebell* is one precursor to *Peter Pan*; it presented to Barrie the possibility of seasonal plays for family audiences that were not, or were not just, pantomime.

Bluebell was one inspiration, alongside a number of pre-existing literary and dramatic texts that were clearly influential for the dramatist. Kirsten Stirling recognises that '[t]here *are* no Native Neverlanders - not the Redskins, not the Pirates, not even Peter Pan himself - because every detail of Neverland is, consciously or unconsciously, imported from somewhere else, and, as Barrie makes clear, in most cases from some other text.'[18] Some of these texts are quite obvious; it is hard not to perceive echoes of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* in the presentation of Hook's pirate entourage. Some are more abstract; in creating an island environment where magic is possible and all human residents are more or less willing immigrants, the play echoes Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

Therefore, it is evident that *Peter Pan* was influenced by pre-existing work, including characteristic traits of Barrie's drama, and draws on pantomime tradition. This combination of influences is significant in explaining the enduring and malleable nature of the play, and its appeal beyond Britain. If it were solely pantomime, it would be unlikely to resonate internationally and yet, that line of influence does explain, to a significant extent, why it rapidly made its way in to the British pantomime repertoire; a phenomenon that will be examined further in Chapter 3.

The creation of Never Land and its inhabitants.

It is worth charting other, discernible influences on Barrie's theatrical imagination; a preoccupation with the ethereal and fantastic qualities of *Peter Pan* can mask the range of inspiration for this play and its stage worlds. For example, why the label Never Land for Peter's imagined realm? While no single, definite inspiration can be determined for this choice, there are uses of the term that would have been palpable for Barrie, by the early 1900s. On 23rd October 1900 Israel Zangwill's one act play *The Moment of Death; or, The*

Never, Never Land, premiered in New York. The evocative title, linking mortality to an impossible world, certainly resonates with *Peter Pan*, and its author was an acquaintance of Barrie's, who sent a telegram apologising for his absence from the opening night of Zangwill's *Children of the Ghetto* in 1899.[19] Although 'Never Land' has been referred to since 1904 as Never Land, Neverland, and Never-Never Land, the earliest version for the play was 'Never, Never, Never Land' which is particularly evocative of the 1900 drama by Zangwill. The idea of a Never Land was also frequently present in the press by the final decades of the nineteenth century, as uninhabited regions in Australia were commonly referred to as 'The Never-Never'. Indeed, the term is still used, on occasion, to refer to remote outback areas of the Northern Territories and Queensland. So, for example, three months before *Peter Pan* was first staged, readers of the *Times* would find a description of 'the endless gum trees of "the bush" spreading from the coast hundreds of miles into the confines of the "Never-Never country", the Wild West of the eastern States'.[20] While the Never Land of the play is not characterised by this sense of expanse, described in the 1928 text as a 'nicely crammed' island environment, some early reviews for the 1904 production used the format 'Never-Never', so the phrase was familiar when the play was created.[21]

Further contextual factors can be traced that surely influenced the creation of the play. Another example is the large number of character names within the play taken from acquaintances of Barrie, from works of literature he admired, and from popular history. These include the pirate character Cecco named after Cecco Hewlett, the son of Barrie's friend, novelist Maurice Hewlett, and frequent allusions to *Treasure Island* and William Kidd in stage directions describing the pirates and their environments. A final example of direct influence upon composition of the play is that the nursery scenes described in stage directions were based directly upon the nursery in the home of renowned architect Edwin Lutyens, at 29 Bloomsbury Square. Lutyens also designed the nursery set for the 1904 production.[22] Despite his reputation as a writer concerned with childhood and imagined worlds, Barrie had one foot squarely in his day to day experience, and this informed the action and setting of the play.

The text we read, published almost a quarter of a century after the first performance, is full of details that were evidently based upon external factors, or that developed during performance. The next chapter examines the influence of early productions upon the play because despite the enduring fascination with personal motivations underpinning the creation of *Peter Pan*, it is essential to recognise that Barrie was a professional writer, creating work in collaboration

with theatre industry professionals. Arguably, the two key influences upon the play's creation - personal incentive and production practice - resulted in a work that is both thematically complex and commercially astute, with an enduring interest for audiences.

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[1] J.A. Hammerton, *J.M. Barrie and His Books* (London: Horace Marshall, 1900), p. 153.
[2] 'Mr. Barrie's New Play', *Edinburgh Evening News*, 28th December 1904.
[3] Barrie, *Peter Pan*, Act 1, p. 90.
[4] Ibid., p. 96.
[5] Carol Mavor, *Reading Boyishly: Roland Barthes, J.M. Barrie, Jacques Henri Lartigue, Marcel Proust, and D.W. Winnicott* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 164.
[6] Donna R. White and C. Anita Tarr, 'Introduction', in *J.M. Barrie's 'Peter Pan' In and Out of Time*, ed. By White and Tarr (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006), pp. vii-xxvi (p. viii).
[7] Barrie, *Peter Pan*, p. 146.
[8] Writing in the *Times*, 21 April 1891; quoted in Christopher Innes, *Modern British Drama: The Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 438.
[9] Barrie, *Peter Pan*, Act 1, p. 88.
[10] Barrie, *Peter Pan*, Act 2, p. 105.
[11] Barrie, *Peter Pan*, Act 3, p. 125.
[12] Barrie, *Peter Pan*, Act 4, pp. 136-7.
[13] Barrie, *Peter Pan*, Act 5 Scene 1, p. 146.
[14] 'Mr. Barrie's New Play: A Real Children's Pantomime', *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 28th December 1904.
[15] Millie Taylor, *British Pantomime Performance* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2007), p. 15.
[16] 'Mr. Barrie's New Play', *Edinburgh Evening News*, 28th December 1904.
[17] 'Vaudeville Theatre', *Times*, 19th December 1901.
[18] Kirsten Stirling, *Peter Pan's Shadows in the Literary Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 21.
[19] This correspondence is housed in the Zangwill Collection, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem, and is referenced in Meri-Jane Rochelson, 'Language, Gender, and Ethnic Anxiety in Zangwill's *Children of the Ghetto*', *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920*, 31:4 (1988), 399-412.
[20] 'Fiscal policy and the Commonwealth', *Times*, 29th September 1904.
[21] Barrie, *Peter Pan*, Act 2, p. 105; 'Our London Letter', *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 28th December 1904; '*Peter Pan* at the Duke of York's Theatre', The *Manchester Guardian*, 28th December 1904.
[22] Correspondence relating to this detail is held in held in the Production file for *Peter Pan*, Duke of York's Theatre, 1904, V&A Theatre & Performance Department.