

Peter Pan and the Mind of J. M. Barrie

Peter Pan and the Mind of J. M. Barrie:

*An Exploration of Cognition
and Consciousness*

By

Rosalind Ridley

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PREFACE

My aim in writing this book is not simply to write about J. M. Barrie, or about Peter Pan, or even just to describe what Barrie was doing when he wrote the *Peter Pan* stories. This book is really about what Barrie thought he was doing, or intended to do, when he wrote these stories. Barrie first told the story of Peter Pan to the young boys of the Llewelyn Davies family whom he met while exercising his St. Bernard dog, Porthos, in Kensington Gardens. So, at one level, Barrie was intending to entertain these young children. His play *Peter Pan, or the boy who wouldn't grow up* had many of the features of a pantomime and was aimed mainly at children, although a pantomime has to appeal to adults as well. Barrie had had a difficult childhood and it is clear that part of Barrie's motivation for inventing the stories was to re-engage with his own childhood and to avoid some of the painful challenges presented to him by adult life. These motivations are explored in Part 1 of this book.

But there are more levels to Peter Pan. The stories contain many quirky, nonsensical ideas that Barrie referred to as his whimsicalities. These whimsical ideas comprise deliberate errors of cognition, that is to say, errors in the way we normally structure our thoughts, leading to the suspicion that Barrie was deliberately exploring the nature of cognition in these stories. Why would he do this? He must have found cognition intrinsically interesting, in much the same way that Lewis Carroll was exhibiting his interest in logic and linguistics when he included logical absurdities in *Alice in Wonderland* and *Alice Through the Looking Glass*. Barrie's whimsicalities serve to compare the cognitive abilities of babies, children, and fairies (who represent children's imagination) to those of adult humans. He is demonstrating that children need to develop cognitively, that is to say, they need to acquire skills of thinking, rather than that they are little adults who need merely to acquire factual information in order to grow up. He was very forward thinking in this respect and much of his motivation seems to have been a plea for a greater understanding of the mental and emotional needs of children.

Barrie not only had an astute understanding of the minds of children, he was also a close observer of the behaviour of animals and he implicitly

compared animals, children and adult humans in the stories of Peter Pan. This reflects the influence that Darwin had had on intellectual thinking in the second half of the nineteenth century and beyond. There had been no need to compare the cognitive mechanisms that controlled the behaviour of animals and humans when animals were mere beasts and Man was made in the image of God. But the theory of evolution had shown that humans were animals and this made animals and humans comparable, not just in their basic anatomy and physiology but in their mental faculties as well. Post-Darwinian anxiety fuelled exploration of these issues, not just amongst scientists, but also in intellectual society in general. Barrie can be seen to be sharing these interests with his educated friends and colleagues. He was a naturalist of the mind, and as such his motivation was a thirst for knowledge. His psychological insights are the subject of Part 2 of this book. My approach has been to look closely at the texts of Barrie's book so that his intention can be considered along side a broader, modern interpretation of the content of his stories.

Many of the behavioural and psychological phenomena that Barrie described can now be understood from a well-established scientific perspective. But cognitive psychology was in its infancy when Barrie was writing so it cannot be said that Barrie incorporated accepted science into his stories. In many cases, his accurate observation of animal and human behaviour precedes the analysis of these behaviours by the scientific community. Like any pioneer, he was probably just intrigued by what he discovered. But he was also a man of his time and in Part 3 I discuss just a few contextual issues that surrounded Barrie in 1900. In my view, Barrie ranks beside Lewis Carroll and Charles Kingsley, author of *The Water-Babies*, as an explorer of science as well as an entertainer of children.

I would like to thank my husband, Harry Baker, for taking my ideas about Peter Pan seriously, reading the text, and helping with the preparation of the manuscript. I thank my friends Rachel Haynes, Robert Fishwick and Richard Hellon for reading substantial parts of the text and Chris Frith for extensive discussions about cognition and for advising me on the whole text.

The illustrations, by Arthur Rackham, were scanned from an early reprint of the first edition of *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*.

PART 1

PETER PAN AND J. M. BARRIE

*Le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point.
—Blaise Pascal. (1)*

INTRODUCTION TO PART 1

There is something of Peter Pan in all of us: the child who lives in the heart of the adult; memories that we carry with us throughout our life but which do not themselves age; dreams that disobey logic; the private world inside our head and those moments of exceptional experience that we rarely talk about. This is the world of Peter Pan. But James Matthew Barrie (1860-1937) who wrote the stories did not just describe Peter, he dissected the nature of cognition in a manner that was remarkably perspicacious for his time, and which takes us inside the structure of consciousness to explore what it is to be human.

There are two books by J. M. Barrie in which Peter Pan appears as the protagonist: *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (2) and *Peter and Wendy* (3), synopses of which are given below. In these books, Barrie also explored the intellectual issues of the day, many of which had developed from the implications of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (4). Intellectuals of the day were not, for the most part, scriptural fundamentalists and so the concern produced by Darwin's ideas was not so much about the veracity of the first verses of Genesis (5), which even then were regarded largely as a socially cohesive creation myth, but was more about how to define being human (or animal) if humans had evolved from, and therefore were, animals. This comparison was most problematic in the poorly understood realm of psychology. The bodies of humans and animals had obvious similarities and differences, but their minds were more difficult to compare. Barrie attributed limited cognitive abilities to fairies, animals, children and Peter Pan (whom he described as a Betwixt-and-Between) in comparison to human adults and, in examining these limitations, he exhibited a profound understanding of human and animal behaviour, particularly with respect to the nature of consciousness and our sense of self. Today these issues are the concern of evolutionary psychology, comparative cognition, and philosophy of mind, and remain amongst the most hotly debated areas of biology. In many instances Barrie seems to have noticed or understood aspects of animal and human behaviour that were not discovered by science until a hundred years later. Barrie demonstrated these insights in many quirky twists to his stories, sometimes known as Barrie-isms, which may be described as mere

whimsy, but which actually map onto important aspects of cognition. My aim will be to demonstrate these from the texts of his books and explain how they are matched by modern experimental psychology.

Barrie was undeniably a strange man with a tragic life and some knowledge of the personal and psychological context in which the books were written is essential if we are to understand the texts. But it is not the main aim of this book to understand Barrie as a person; rather this book seeks to demonstrate his remarkable understanding of post-Darwinian cognitive psychology.

CHAPTER ONE

ABOUT PETER PAN

The Peter Pan Books

The book *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* is about Peter Pan when he was one week old and the book *Peter and Wendy* is about Peter when he was a young boy. In *Peter and Wendy*, Peter seems to be about seven years old although his immaturity is stressed by the claim that he still has all his baby teeth. The text of *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* was first published in 1902 as Chapters XIII to XVIII in the novel *The Little White Bird* (6) but it was then published as a separate book in 1906.

Peter and Wendy was published as a novel in 1911 but it was based on the play *Peter Pan, or the boy who wouldn't grow up*, first performed in 1904 (7). The play must have been an extraordinary performance. It had a large cast of speaking parts, including three children, together with an opportunity for a variable number of extras all dressed in elaborate costumes as pirates, Native Americans, fairies, mermaids and animals. There were two large battles, a farcical chase where everyone was running on and off the stage and the children had to fly. This was achieved by raising the actors off the ground using a harness and pulleys. This was a novel event for the stage. The children in the audience would have been completely taken in by this and the adults would have been frightened that an accident might happen. The children were invited to clap if they believed in fairies. This is also an early example of the currently popular genre of interactive fiction because if the children had not clapped, the fairy Tinker Bell would have died, there would have been no fairy dust to enable the children to fly home and everything would have ended in catastrophe.

The play underwent many changes in text from its first performance to the definitive script published in 1928. I will only comment occasionally on the final script of the play because most of the Barrie-isms also appear in *Peter and Wendy* or could not be incorporated in the speech or stage

directions in the play. Both books deal with events that take place at night, and night is very important to Barrie. I will argue that quite a number of specific events in the books are the direct result of Barrie's dream-related experiences.

Both books deal extensively with the nature of love, comparing, conflating and confusing sexual desire, possessiveness, jealousy, motherly-love, tender loving care, home building and housework. From a feminist perspective, this is very depressing, but I will argue that this conflation can be related to Barrie's disturbed childhood and even more disturbed marriage rather than to what he thought was an appropriate role for women. All of the male characters in both books are perpetually concerned with finding a mother, or a mother substitute, and as such all the male characters can be taken to represent Barrie. They all suffer from possessiveness and jealousy but the sought-after prize is always tender loving care. Sexual desire is rarely mentioned explicitly although a deep sexuality suffuses much of the text. Although the themes of *Peter Pan* may arise from Barrie's emotional difficulties, most of the Barrie-isms are logical and linguistic constructions about cognition. They are inserted into the story for their own intrinsic interest as Barrie explores the nature of consciousness and human experience.

Synopsis of Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens

The book starts with the narrator (Barrie) taking his friend's son, David, and his large St. Bernard dog, Porthos, for a walk in Kensington Gardens in London. The Round Pond, where small boys float their toy boats, the Broad Walk, where the nannies push their prams, and various other features of the Gardens are described. The layout of the Gardens is explained including the fact that the Gardens are contiguous with Hyde Park, which lies to the east of the Gardens. A small part of the Serpentine Lake is in the Gardens, while the greater part of the lake is in Hyde Park. Bird Island is in the Hyde Park part of the lake. According to the story, human babies are incubated from eggs laid by birds on Bird Island and delivered to their human mothers by fairies. Babies who babble before speaking comprehensible words are supposedly speaking Fairy, a language spoken by birds, fairies and newborn babies but subsequently forgotten by babies as they get older.

The narrator then tells David about how Peter Pan flew out of the window of his mother's house one night when he was only a week old, and landed

in the Gardens. The action in Kensington Gardens all takes place at night, after Lock-Out Time, when the fairies come out, and the birds take on human attributes. There is a brief appearance of two small boys who had fallen out of their prams and been forgotten about by their nannies and a little girl called Maimie, who was locked-in overnight by accident. The story is unusual in that the main character is a very small baby rather than a child. The fairies are all frightened of Peter so he flies to Bird Island to consult the wise crow, Solomon, who explains to him that he is a Betwixt-and-Between, mentally part human and part bird. The other birds, though wary of him, look after him and feed him and he begins to learn their ways. They tell him about the children who visit the Gardens and Peter resolves to return to the Garden to see them. By now Peter has forgotten how to fly so he uses a five pound note which has been found floating in the lake to pay the thrushes to build him a boat so that he can sail across the Serpentine to the Gardens.

When Peter lands in the Garden after Lock-Out Time, he is greeted by the fairies who, this time, decide to accept him. He plays in the Gardens, often using toys that children have left behind, although he does not understand how each toy should be used. At this point, he thinks he should return to his mother so the Queen Fairy, Queen Mab, restores his ability to fly and he flies back to his mother's bedroom. But the fun of playing with the fairies is too much for him and he returns to the Gardens without waking her. Some months later he returns again to his mother but the window has now been barred and another baby is lying in the cot next to her. Condemned to live in the Gardens forever, Peter plays his panpipes for the fairies and joins in their activities.

A young girl, Maimie, is locked in to the Gardens overnight and observes the Fairy Ball, which contains a Cinderella story. But it is a cold night and Maimie needs protection so the fairies build a house round her to keep her warm. Early the next morning she steps out of her house, which fades away, and she meets Peter. A complicated conversation ensues about love and goats and grown-ups but then the gates are unlocked and Maimie escapes from the Gardens and runs back home. At the end of the walk, the narrator explains to David that the fairies now build a house every night in case another child should be locked in the Gardens. He then shows David two stones set in the grass in the Gardens. These are parish boundary stones, but the narrator explains that these are the tombstones of two children who perished in the Gardens and were buried by Peter.

The themes include not only mother-child relations, but also the psychological differences between animals, babies, children and adults. Altered states of consciousness, the structure of cognitive space (the way our thoughts are laid out and interact inside our mind), and the nature of mental representation (the relationship between things in the outside world and our thoughts about those things) are also discussed. The first edition, published in 1906, had 50 colour lithographs of watercolour drawings by Arthur Rackham. A smaller revised version was published four years later with 25 of the original lithographs.

Synopsis of *Peter and Wendy*

Peter begins to visit Wendy, John and Michael, the children of Mr. and Mrs. Darling, in their dreams. Then Mrs. Darling falls asleep while telling the children bedtime stories, and Peter breaks into her mind too. Nana, the Newfoundland dog that acts as the children's nanny, arrives and Peter tries to escape but loses his shadow on the way. The next week Peter returns with the fairy Tinker Bell. Wendy sews his shadow back on and Peter persuades the children to fly away with him to Neverland. The children have various dream-related experiences as they are flying along. When they arrive in Neverland, they first meet the mermaids in the lagoon and then Peter's Lost Boys – boys who fell out of their prams and were lost in Kensington Gardens. Then they encounter Captain Hook and his pirates, who are being pursued by Native Americans, many wild animals and finally a crocodile. Meanwhile the Lost Boys hide in an underground cavern, which Wendy has made into a home.

Captain Hook hated Peter because, in a previous battle, Peter had severed Hook's arm and fed it to the crocodile. The crocodile, which had also swallowed a clock and therefore made a ticking noise, wanted to eat the rest of Hook. Captain Hook and the pirates are pursuing Peter but the Lost Boys emerge from their underground home to protect Peter. Wendy flies overhead and is shot down by one of the Lost Boys and badly injured. The Lost Boys, who now include Wendy's brothers, John and Michael, build a house (the original Wendy House) around her to save her life. Wendy recovers and continues to look after the Lost Boys in their underground home. After some time of peace when the Lost Boys play with the mermaids in the Lagoon, the pirates return. The pirates capture Tiger Lily, the Native American princess, but Peter tricks the pirates into setting her free and the grateful Native Americans join Peter in his fight. A battle, which is psychological as well as physical, ensues between Peter and

Hook. Peter is injured but Hook swims away, chased by the crocodile. Peter and Wendy are washed up on a small rock, which begins to sink. Peter saves Wendy by tying her to a kite that carries her away, expecting to die himself when the waters rise further. At this point Peter claims:

To die will be an awfully big adventure. (3)

But then a Never Bird arrives, floating in her nest, and offers to help him. Peter takes the eggs out of the nest and puts them in his hat. The boat and the hat float away saving both Peter and the eggs. Domestic life resumes in the underground home. Wendy tells the Lost Boys about life in the Darling family and promises John and Michael that they will return there one day. While Peter and the Lost Boys are underground, the pirates launch their most deadly attack on the Native Americans. Many Native Americans are killed but Hook orders the tom-tom to be beaten to indicate a Native American victory. The Lost Boys are deceived, come above ground and are carried off, together with Wendy, to the pirate ship. Hook climbs down into the underground home, finds Peter asleep and poisons Peter's medicine. But Tinker Bell sees this and drinks the poison to save him. Peter revives her by asking all the children who are dreaming (i.e. children who are reading about Neverland) to clap if they believe in fairies, as this will revive her. In the play it is the audience that is asked to clap:

"If you believe," he shouted to them, "clap your hands; don't let Tink die."
(7)

Tinker Bell recovers and they set off to rescue Wendy and the Lost Boys. On the ship, the Lost Boys are being prepared to walk the plank, but then Hook hears a ticking sound. Thinking it is the crocodile, Hook panics and hides below deck. But it is Peter who is making a ticking noise as he arrives on deck and hides in the cabin. Hook herds the bound Lost Boys into the cabin which he believes to be empty, but Peter is able to undo their chains and let them out. Hook, believing that girls are bad luck, decides to fling Wendy overboard. This is too much for Peter who launches a savage attack on the pirates until all of them, except Hook, are killed. Peter flings himself at Hook, who jumps overboard and is eaten by the crocodile. The next day, Peter is briefly Captain Pan.

Meanwhile a sad tale is told of Mr. and Mrs. Darling lost in grief for their children. Mr. Darling's feelings of guilt are so deep that he lives in the dog kennel. Peter and Tinker Bell lead the children back to their home but Peter cannot bear the thought of going to school so he and Tinker Bell fly

back to Neverland. The next morning the children wake up and are reunited with their parents as if nothing had happened. Mrs. Darling agrees to adopt the other Lost Boys. Peter returns every year to see Wendy and then her daughter, Jane, and eventually her granddaughter, Margaret. He, of course, does not age because he is just a memory of childhood dreams.

The first edition of *Peter and Wendy*, published in 1911, had 11 half-tone engravings by Francis Donkin Bedford. Like *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, this book also explores the psychological processes which develop and, more importantly, fade away during childhood. As C. S. Lewis pointed out, it is these reminders of childhood that make children's books of interest to adults:

Some day you will be old enough to start reading fairy tales again. (8)

What Type of Story is Peter Pan?

Most cultures and traditions have a Golden Age Myth about a time when the world was natural, beautiful and plentiful and people and animals lived without strife, in contrast to the present where there is discord and sorrow. Peter Pan is one such myth and giving Peter the surname Pan indicates this. The god Pan was a minor deity from pre-Christian Greek mythology who lived in Arcadia, a Utopian place that existed during the mythological Golden Age. Pan is also the Greek word for *all* so that Pan is *all of nature* and *all of us*. The god Pan had the head and body of a man but the back legs and, by implication, the genitals of a goat. He also had the devilish horns of a goat. As such, the god Pan was also a Betwixt-and-Between, neither wholly animal nor wholly human. He was the god of nature, the wild, nymphs and shepherds, and all aspects of the pastoral idyll. The god Pan was unconstrained by the demands of civilisation and is often portrayed as selfish or naughty. It is perhaps not surprising that G. K. Chesterton said:

Pan died because Christ was born. (9)

The god Pan plays a flute or pipes and Peter Pan is illustrated on the front cover of the first edition of *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* riding a goat. On the front cover of the first revised version Peter is playing the panpipes. In the story, Peter plays the panpipes to accompany the dancing at the Fairy Ball. Ironically, Pan was the only Greek god to die, whereas Peter was *the boy who wouldn't grow up (7)* and therefore does not die.

There is always an air of sexual danger about the god Pan whereas Peter Pan was ignorant, not only of sexual matters, but also of many acts of affectionate social intercourse such as kissing.

Peter Pan is also a dystopian Coming-of-Age story. The books are about what happens to a child when the maturing infant brain develops the capacity to remember the past and anticipate the future but, in so doing, loses the ability to engage in the present as an all absorbing experience. The psychological milestones that are achieved by the developing child are viewed as a loss rather than an achievement:

All children, except one, grow up. They soon know that they will grow up, and the way Wendy knew was this. One day when she was two years old she was playing in a garden, and she plucked another flower and ran with it to her mother. I suppose she must have looked rather delightful, for Mrs. Darling put her hand to her heart and cried, "Oh, why can't you remain like this for ever!" This was all that passed between them on the subject, but henceforth Wendy knew that she must grow up. You always know after you are two. Two is the beginning of the end. (3)

The idea that Peter Pan could be about a lost Golden Age that preceded Westernisation and simultaneously about a lost idyllic childhood that precedes the complications of adulthood would not have seemed out of place at the beginning of the twentieth century. Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919) was a Darwinian biologist who studied taxonomy and embryology and who introduced the term *recapitulation* to refer to the observation that the embryological development of an individual follows, or recapitulates, the evolution of a species. A tiny human embryo, for example, has a tail and looks a bit like a fish.

Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens is a Frankenstein story in the sense that Peter, as a Betwixt-and-Between, is a creature that is neither human nor animal. In the pre-Darwinian novel, *Frankenstein* (10) by Mary Shelley, the man-made monster was also not quite human, allowing the author to compare him to normal people and thereby explore what it meant to be human, to have a soul, to have feelings, to have moral responsibility and to belong to a society and a culture. Barrie, similarly, considered which aspects of behaviour are instinctive and which have to be acquired culturally. *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* is also a very early example of Magic Realism. Impossible things (people flying) occur in mundane surroundings (Kensington Gardens) and time moves differently for different people. Peter gets no older even though Wendy eventually

becomes an adult. The juxtaposition of the magical and the mundane produces a heightened sense of what reality is. Occasionally the narrator addresses the reader directly, to emphasize his separateness from the story in a manner typical of magic realism:

The extraordinary upshot of this adventure was....but we have not decided yet that this is the adventure we are to narrate. Perhaps a better one would be the night attack by the redskins on the house under the ground, when several of them stuck in the hollow trees and had to be pulled out like corks. Or we might tell how Peter saved Tiger Lily's life in the Mermaids' Lagoon, and so made her his ally. (3)

Both books are written from the point of view of an outsider, a small, lonely boy who does not know quite how to behave as a human or what to do with objects made by humans:

So Peter had to find out many things for himself. He often played ships at the Round Pond, but his ship was only a hoop, which he had found on the grass. Of course, he had never seen a hoop, and he wondered what you play at with them, and decided that you play at pretending they are boats. This hoop always sank at once, but he waded in for it, and sometimes he dragged it gleefully round the rim of the pond, and he was quite proud to think that he had discovered what boys do with hoops. (2)

Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens is the story of a Secret Garden. This idea has a long history going back to medieval times where the *hortus conclusus* was an enclosed garden associated with the Virgin Mary, representing purity and separation from the sins of the world. The enclosed garden story most relevant and contemporaneous with that of Peter Pan is *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett (11). Here two children, one psychologically damaged and the other physically disabled, meet in a Secret Garden. Both children eventually find health through their love for each other and for natural things when they have been separated from malevolent adult influences. *Peter and Wendy* is a Desert Island story where desert islands (or more properly deserted islands since they usually have lush vegetation but no inhabitants) represent places, like secret gardens, which are separated from external influences and where physical adventures can occur and social ideas can be explored. As a boy, Barrie had been an avid reader of children's literature including *Robinson Crusoe* (12), *The Coral Island* (13) and *Treasure Island* (14). In the preface to the 1913 edition of *The Coral Island*, Barrie says:

To be born is to be wrecked on an island. (13)

This suggests that arriving on the island represents the dawning of consciousness. The names of the pirates in Neverland, with whom Peter has already had many previous encounters, refer to characters in *Treasure Island* (14). In *Peter and Wendy*, Neverland is described as being an island and in *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, Peter lives partly on Bird Island in the Serpentine Lake in Hyde Park. Two other plays by Barrie, *The Admirable Crichton* (15) and *Mary Rose* (16), also include visits to uninhabited islands where strange things happen before the characters return to their normal existence on the mainland. In an early script of *Mary Rose*, there was even a brief appearance of Peter playing his panpipes on the island, but this was later deleted (17).

The *Peter Pan* stories are also Fairy Stories. Fairies, in various guises, have a long tradition in folklore and appear as diminutive, mischievous creatures in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (18) (another island story), and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (19) (a dream story). Barrie's fairies can be seen as children's ideas:

Long ago children were forbidden the Gardens, and at that time there was not a fairy in the place; then the children were admitted, and the fairies came trooping in that very evening. (2)

It was Barrie's view that education can seriously damage a child's imagination. In talking about Pilkington, the schoolmaster in the preparatory school that all the boys in the Gardens must go to when they are eight years old, Barrie says:

Tis fear of thee and thy gown and thy cane, which is part of thee, that makes the fairies hide by day. (6)

Queen Mab first appears in a speech by Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet* (20) where she is described as a tiny fairy who burrows into people's brains when they are asleep, causing them to have dreams. In *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, Queen Mab restores Peter's ability to fly when he has become too nearly human, implying that Peter's flying is a metaphor for dreaming.

Peter and Wendy is a Quest Story in that Peter sets out to rescue Wendy from Captain Hook, and to overcome many other life-threatening difficulties. But Wendy grows up, whereas Peter decides to return to Neverland and live forever as a child, so in the end, the quest is abandoned. The play of *Peter Pan* is usually presented as a pantomime

where fables (stories where animals have human attributes) and fairy stories suitable for children run in parallel with darker, magic realism themes for adults. As in any pantomime, the Principal Boy (Peter) is usually played by a woman. Nana, the dog who acts as a nursery nurse, is played by an actor in an animal suit and takes the place of the pantomime horse. There is an essential bit of audience participation to save the fairy, Tinker Bell. But the play also has moments of farce when children, pirates, mermaids, fairies, Native Americans and a ticking crocodile chase each other on and off the stage in a chaotic plot.

Two very popular books written just after Barrie was born would almost certainly have influenced Barrie. *The Water Babies, a Fairy Tale for a Land Boy* (21) was written by Charles Kingsley in 1862 for his son, Grenville, who was then 4 years old. It is about a boy chimneysweep, Tom, who drowns and joins the Water Babies and other allegorical figures in an alternative world below water. It is a criticism of child labour in England, but it is also a satire about evolution. Mother Carey [Mother Nature] is asked if she uses her time and energy to make new types of animal but she replies:

So people fancy. But I am not going to trouble myself to make things, my little dear. I sit here and make them make themselves. (21)

The other book is *Alice in Wonderland* (22) written in 1865 by Lewis Carroll. Alice falls down a rabbit hole into another alternative world, has hallucinatory experiences and meets many bizarre and puzzling creatures who present her with numerous intellectual conundrums. Barrie's stories take place in alternative worlds and contain hallucinatory experiences, intellectual paradoxes, dead Lost Boys equivalent to dead Water Babies, oblique discussions about evolution, and, in *Peter and Wendy*, the children visit Neverland, a kind of nocturnal equivalent of Alice's Wonderland. In addition to these similarities in plot, Barrie and Carroll shared other aspects of psychological make-up and Carroll's relationship to Alice Liddell and some of her sisters was as ambiguous as Barrie's relationship to the Llewelyn Davies boys, to be described later.

Two further books, *The Golden Age* (23) and *Dream Days* (24) written by his friend Kenneth Grahame, may also have had an influence on Barrie. In *The Golden Age*, Grahame describes adults as Olympians who do not understand the emotional needs of children. The influence can be seen, for example, where Grahame shows a boy, Jason, paddling his fantasy boat (a

pig-trough) using a garden spade, and Barrie shows Peter paddling his boat (a bird's nest) using a child's toy spade (2).

Why Were the Stories Written?

The stories of Peter Pan were created to amuse George, John (Jack), Peter, and later Michael and Nicholas (Nico), the children of Arthur and Sylvia Llewelyn Davies, whom Barrie met with their nanny when out walking in Kensington Gardens. But the stories contain ideas of such philosophical complexity that Barrie must have either been contemplating these ideas for a long time, or have elaborated the stories substantially when they were subsequently written down.

The stories in *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* in which Peter Pan is an infant were created between 1897 and 1902, when Peter Llewelyn Davies was between infancy and five years old. The boy David, whom the narrator is taking for a walk in Kensington Gardens represents George Llewelyn Davies, who was then between four and nine years old. The play *Peter Pan, or the boy who wouldn't grow up* (7) in which Peter Pan is about seven years old was first performed in 1904 when Peter Llewelyn Davies was seven years old. The stories in the play were told particularly to Peter's younger brother, Michael, who was then about four years old. In the play and in *Peter and Wendy*, Wendy's brothers John and Michael Darling represent John and Michael Llewelyn Davies who were 10 years and 4 years old in 1904. Nicholas Llewelyn Davies, who was born in 1903, does not appear specifically in the stories. Wendy does not have a counterpart in the Llewelyn Davies family, although as a girl who mothers her own brothers she resembles Barrie mother, Margaret Ogilvy, whose own mother died young so that Margaret raised her own brothers while she was still a teenager. The name Wendy, which had not been used before, is supposedly based on Margaret Henley, the daughter of Barrie's friend, the poet and critic, William Henley. Margaret, who died at the age of six, referred to Barrie as *my friendly* but she could not pronounce the consonant *r* so it sounded like *my fWendy* (25).

While the *stories* may have been created for the Llewelyn Davies boys, the *books* must have been constructed from some other motive. *The Little White Bird* was not intended for children, not just because the chapters which surround the Peter Pan section are about adult themes such as personal and sexual jealousy, but also because it has a complex, elliptical style that makes it hard to follow, even for adults. Even the chapters that

were published later as *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* are complicated and it would have been necessary to read them to small children. In this respect the books were like many other books written for children at the time. Not only was the language far too complicated for children, the books themselves were expensive and often lavishly illustrated using the new printing process of chromolithography. The illustrations were printed on sheets of superior paper that were glued into the book under leaves of tissue paper. First editions usually consisted of a deluxe, signed print-run bound in vellum. The books were intended to appeal to adults, and to be only read from, or shown to, children. They would not have been given to children who might handle them carelessly. Within a few years of their publication, Barrie authorized the poet and writer May Byron to re-write the books so that they could be read by quite young children: *J. M. Barrie's Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens-Retold for Little People* (26) illustrated by Arthur Rackham and *J. M. Barrie's Peter Pan and Wendy-Retold for Little People* (27) illustrated by Mabel Lucie Attwell. It was not unusual to rewrite stories such as this. Lewis Carroll wrote *The Nursery Alice* (28), a simplified version of the *Alice in Wonderland* (22) for very young children.

Barrie can be heard as the narrator in both of the Peter Pan books, and the impression is given that Barrie is writing about himself, to himself, as a private exercise. Unlike Alice in *Alice in Wonderland* (22), where the story is told through the eyes of a child, making it easy for a later child audience to identify with the story, Peter is not the protagonist in the *Peter Pan* story, but is rather something to be observed or dealt with. Peter is not a real child but is more like the child (or childishness) and the animal (or instinctiveness) that lives on within the mind of the rational human adult.

The novel *The Little White Bird* is about a man, a woman (who is not the man's wife) and her son. The title phrase *The Little White Bird* appears to refer to the white pages of a partly written book and to an unborn child. Barrie can be detected, to some extent, in all the adult male characters of his books while Barrie's infant *alter ego* is Peter Pan. Autobiographical aspects of the book can be further detected in the narrator's female friend who is called Mary A.... and her son who is called David. David was the name of Barrie's older brother, who had died when Barrie was 6 years old and Barrie's wife was Mary Ansell. But as the book progresses David ceases to be the brother who is remembered only as a child and comes to resemble both the child whom Barrie longed to have, the oldest Llewelyn Davies boy, George, to whom Barrie was particularly close at the time,

and later George's younger brother Michael when George began to grow up. The female friend ceases to resemble his wife, Mary Ansell, and becomes more like the Llewelyn Davies boys' mother, Sylvia. The equivalence of other characters in *The Little White Bird* and people in Barrie's life also changes throughout the book so that trying to work out who represents who is like trying to find the lines of linear perspective in a cubist painting. And like linear perspective in a cubist painting, it does not matter. The novel ends with a discussion as to who was the more creative, Mary who had intended to write *The Little White Bird* but had had her son, David, which prevented her from writing, or the narrator who had stolen the idea of *The Little White Bird* and finished the book, but who had only pretended to have had a child called Timothy. Today this conversation would be interpreted as being about *work/life balance* but in fact the conversation is about what was the subject of the conversation. If the subject of the conversation was the book itself, then Barrie had the book and Mary only had the idea of the book. So Barrie had what he called the *substance* and she had the *shadow*. But if the subject of the conversation was the content of the book, then Mary had the *substance* because the book was about her child, David, whereas Barrie only had the *shadow* because he alludes in the book to his own child, Timothy, who was a pretence.

The impression that Barrie was writing about himself, to himself, is strengthened by Barrie's frequent claims that he did not write his own books. In *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, Barrie claimed that the imaginative parts of the story came from the fictional boy, David, who was accompanying him on his walk through Kensington Gardens:

I ought to mention here that the following is our way with a story: first I tell it to him, and then he tells it to me, the understanding being that it is quite a different story; 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. In this story of Peter Pan, for instance, the bald narrative and most of the moral reflections are mine, though not all, for this boy can be a stern moralist; but the interesting bits about the ways and customs of babies in the bird-stage are mostly reminiscences of David's, recalled by pressing his hands to his temples and thinking hard. (2)

It could be argued that what Barrie was trying to do was to be himself as a child, writing to himself as an adult, in order to keep alive those experiences of childhood that he so valued. As a child, Barrie had written desert-island adventures for himself (29) and as an adult he had claimed,

jokingly, that Peter Llewelyn Davies, aged 4 years, had compiled a book of photographs of himself and the Llewelyn Davies boys playing pirates, *The Boy Castaways of Black Lake Island* (30), which Barrie had, of course, compiled himself. At this time, Peter Llewelyn Davies stood for Barrie as a boy.

There are substantial parallels in the childhood experiences of Barrie and his friend, Kenneth Grahame (1859-1932). Both authors may have been trying to expiate problems in their own childhood. Grahame's mother died when he was 5 years old and Barrie's mother was bereaved and depressed when Barrie was 6 years old. Grahame says of the relatives that reared him:

They treated us, indeed, with kindness enough as to the needs of the flesh, but after that with indifference....and therewith the commonplace conviction that your child is merely animal. At a very early age I remember realizing.... the existence of that stupidity, and its tremendous influence in the world. (23)

Similarities in their literary works for children confirm the motivational link between difficult experiences in childhood and a subsequent interest in the psychological make-up of the child. Kenneth Grahame wrote *The Wind in the Willows* (31) for his own son, Alastair, in 1908, six years after Peter Pan first appeared in *The Little White Bird*. *The Wind in the Willows* (31) contains an incongruous chapter about the god Pan, which is not essential to the plot and which may have been inspired by Peter Pan. Grahame's works follow similar themes to Peter Pan including the lost glory of childhood, and the antipathy between nature and civilization.

There is never a good time for a boy to be separated from his mother but 5-6 years old falls on an important developmental boundary. At that age many children begin to encounter and understand a world outside their own home, and learn to handle abstract concepts and use the symbols needed for reading. They start to fit their world into a wider context that encompasses an orderly progression of time, and develop a series of memories that make up a life story. This requires the comprehension of time, space and context and, as I shall explain later, these mental faculties are dependent on the frontal lobes (a large area at the front of the brain) and the hippocampus (an important area inside the cerebral hemispheres in the brain). Together, the frontal lobes and the hippocampus are required for personal memory and planning. The brain grows and matures slowly during the whole of childhood and adolescence but the frontal lobes and

the hippocampus make an increasing contribution from the age of about 4 years and their maturation is not complete until adulthood. This is somewhat later than the rest of the cerebral cortex that is involved in the immediate experience of the present (32) (33). This may explain, for example, why teenagers, however academically gifted, rarely remember their packed lunch, and would have difficulty running a household.

I will argue in Part 2 that many of Barrie's quirky insights into cognitive psychology are concerned with comparisons of the functions of the hippocampus and frontal lobes, on the one hand, and the function of the rest of the cerebral cortex on the other. These two brain systems can sometimes be in competition with each other to such a degree that the demands of the mundane day-to-day world of adult life may blot out the intensity of simple experience. Don't we all sometimes miss the beautiful sunset because we are too busy worrying about getting home? An abrupt disruption of development between a self-centred infancy and the demands of being a grown-up, because of separation from the mother or from the mother's attention during childhood, may lead to a profound sense of loss of an idyllic world which an adult may desperately seek to recapture, leading in some cases to mental illness in adulthood (34). Barrie suffered this type of disruption in his own development as a child. This may have contributed to the bleak and taciturn aspects of his adult personality, which he may have compared to memories of intense perceptual experiences in his own childhood. This, in turn, may have led him to think about the different way the mind works in early childhood and in later life. A comparison of the two types of experience, which he regards as typical of childhood and adulthood, feature repeatedly in his books:

Nothing that happens after we are twelve matters very much. (35)

My view is that Barrie invented Peter Pan essentially for himself in order to explore and perhaps make some sense of his own emotional difficulties, to investigate the interplay of the world of facts and the world of the imagination and to re-discover the heightened experiences of infancy. In the process he created a work of genius.

CHAPTER TWO

ABOUT J. M. BARRIE

Relations with Other People

A little background knowledge of Barrie's lifetime experiences is essential if we are to understand the motivation behind his choice of plot, character and anecdote in his writing. Barrie was born in 1860 in Kirriemuir in Angus, Scotland, into an aspiring family of weavers. After acquiring a good education including a degree from Edinburgh University, he became a journalist, novelist and playwright. Following a brief stay in Nottingham, he moved to London and had various addresses in Bloomsbury and Bayswater. He earned his living writing articles for a number of periodicals including the *St James's Gazette* edited by Frederick Greenwood (25). He also had many articles accepted by William Henley, an important literary figure who edited the *National Observer*. Henley commissioned articles from many young writers, including Thomas Hardy, Rudyard Kipling, H. G. Wells and W. B. Yeats (36). This provided Barrie with the necessary introductions in London to allow him to become well known in fashionable literary circles.

In 1894, Barrie married Mary Ansell, a popular London actress. In 1897, he met the Llewelyn Davies children and their nanny in Kensington Gardens and soon after met their mother at a social occasion. For a few years from 1901 onwards, Barrie and his wife invited the Llewelyn Davies family on several holidays to their cottage, *Black Lake Cottage*, in Farnham in Surrey.

By 1900 Barrie was becoming quite well known as a literary figure and playwright. The draft script of the play *Peter Pan* was read by the actor/manager Herbert Beerbohm Tree who was accustomed to putting on extravagant productions at *His Majesty's Theatre* in London. But he just could not cope with the huge cast, flamboyant costumes, riotous plot and the technically difficult flying scenes, and declared:

Barrie has gone out of his mind. (36)

What Barrie had actually done was get inside his own mind. Charles Frohman, another impresario, decided to put the play on at the *Duke of York's Theatre* in London and it was a sensation. The following year the play opened in New York to even greater acclaim. Barrie rapidly became a wealthy playwright and author. By the end of his life, Barrie had published many books, numerous articles and twenty plays. He visited America several times in connection with his plays and took several vacations in Paris.

At about the time that *Peter Pan* was first performed, the Llewelyn Davies family moved away from Kensington to Berkhamsted, for reasons that are not entirely clear, although Barrie continued to visit them regularly. But within the next few years Arthur and Sylvia Llewelyn Davies both died of cancer while the boys were still teenagers. Barrie became their guardian and paid for their private education. He also became a great benefactor to other individual children and to children's charities in later life. But Barrie's relationships with adults and children were unusual and it will be necessary to look at these in order to gain an appropriate context in which to place his *Peter Pan* stories.

The outbreak of the First World War was the end of an era for the whole of Europe and much of the rest of the world. Barrie's world was personally shattered mainly by the death of George Llewelyn Davies in the trenches in 1915 and the early death of Michael Llewelyn Davies shortly after the war. Although he remained immensely wealthy he became darker and more withdrawn as time passed. In much later life, he became a heroin user, mainly in an attempt to deal with his life-long sleep disturbances and respiratory disease, and died of pneumonia in 1937, aged 77 (29).

Barrie clearly had difficult memories of the adults that surrounded him when he was a child and says of Peter:

He was so full of wrath against grown-ups, who as usual, were spoiling everything, that as soon as he got inside his tree he breathed intentionally quick short breaths at the rate of about five to a second. He did this because there is a saying in the Neverland, that every time you breathe, a grown-up dies; and Peter was killing them off vindictively as fast as possible. (3)