

Queering Neverland: A Dramaturgy of Care

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About the Author:

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“Meet-Cute”

Ironically for a play whose main struggle is with the transience of love and memory, I remember exactly where I was when I fell in love with Kimberly Belflower’s *Lost Girl*. My wheelchair was parked in my apartment bathroom, it was two o’clock in the morning after a long and gender-dysphoric day, and I had resolved to skim its early pages before going to bed. At the time, I was a graduate student at American University, and Aaron Posner—one of our professors who would direct *Lost Girl* the following semester—had emailed the theatre department a copy of Belflower’s lyrical one-act, her script inspired by J.M. Barrie’s continuously adapted stage play: *Peter Pan; or, the Boy Who Wouldn’t Grow Up* (Barrie 1904). Posner included a PDF of Belflower’s script, a link to sign up for auditions, and an invitation to write if we had questions.

I didn’t ask to be whisked away to Neverland. But then, I hit a line of protagonist Wendy Darling’s that, like so much of Belflower’s writing, just sat there on page seven with no idea it could change my world: “The first time I kissed him, it felt more like flying than flying did. The last time I kissed him was the last time I saw him. I didn’t know it was the last time. It was just another kiss” (Belflower 2019, 7).

Needless to say, I did not go to bed.

In *Lost Girl*’s ninety minutes, Belflower shows us what happens to Wendy Darling, her brothers, the “Lost Boys”—Nibs, Toodles, Curly and Slightly, who are Peter Pan’s closest friends—and others in the years after their return from Neverland, to the Darling home. As early as her character descriptions, Belflower sets her version of the Peter Pan saga apart from earlier depictions, writing: “It is absolutely essential for this play to be cast with diverse actors... In professional settings, this should be at least 50% actors of color. In educational settings, that should be the best you can possibly do,” (Belflower 2019, 3). In the week after I read *Lost Girl*, I learned that most productions have honored that assertion, including the play’s workshop at The University of Texas at Austin in November 2016 and its world premiere at Milwaukee Repertory Theater in 2018, among others (Belflower 2019, Lawler 2018, Mikeska 2016, Zhou 2020). However, conventional productions suggest the play’s “Lost Boys” roles be filled by male actors and its romances be heterosexual, rendering the play void of queerness across sexuality and gender.

However, from my first reading, Belflower’s words sat in my body differently. The pressure Wendy faces to grieve, emote, and behave however other people want her to—and her internal and external conflict over whether to let herself see Slightly in a romantic light—took on the color of

my experiences with misogyny and internalized homophobia. Slightly's struggle to be seen authentically by the world and people he loves mirrored my struggles with gender, homophobia, and ableism. Growing up in the American South, I have seen oppressive environments disregard the complexities of people's identities. At the expense of my mental health, I did not acknowledge my own queer sexuality or gender dysphoria until my twenties, and ableism largely convinced me I could never be seen in a romantic or sexual light. Those experiences taught me how painful and isolating it can be when our complexly layered identities are ignored. Truly noticing people—digging deeper in support and understanding—takes care. That care changes people, in its presence or its absence. So when I noticed the parallels between my struggles and those of *Belflower's* characters—when I became aware of the ways my personal history had woven itself into my understanding of this play—I took the time, through research and critical engagement, to keep exploring.

Without even realizing, I had integrated a dramaturgy of care into my approach as one of our production's assistant directors.

Dramaturgical Philosophy

Theatre practitioners have been debating the role of dramaturgs for as long as theaters have officially employed them (Switzky 2014, 173). Classically, they have been everything from “someone who can help you place your work in a historical or cultural context, reminding you of things that have come before you and how the story you are trying to tell can resonate in the present” as director Jackson Gay puts it (Gay 2014, 214), to a person “taking notes, making observations, exploring contexts” during a theatrical process as Brecht thought and Lawrence Switzky notes (Switzky 2014, 175), to serving as literary managers, reading and selecting plays for theatres (Switzky 2014). Jessica Kaplow Applebaum posits dramaturgy is a “field (or fields) of specialization” that can be enhanced via hyphenation, i.e. the choreographer-dramaturg or director-dramaturg, particularly in devised theatre (Applebaum 2014, 197); Switzky, on the other hand, insists that “the dramaturg resists specialization at large, the better to facilitate thought between divisions of expertise” (Switzky 2014, 177). The “mystery” of dramaturgs' work confounds some of their colleagues and delights others (Gay 2014, 214). In their multiplicity, dramaturgs can navigate “the traffic between theory and practice, play and production” (Applebaum 2014, 199) and often both “starts and listens to many conversations, but isn't confined to any one,” (Switzky 2014, 174). At their best, dramaturgs can be “organizing presences,” per

Sarah Sigal (Sigal 2014, 190), and “the connective tissue of organized chaos,” (Applebaum 2014, 199).

Despite the lack of consensus, all these functions have their place in the dramaturg’s toolbelt. To craft my own spin on a so-called “dramaturgy of care”—a practice of methodically integrating dramaturgy into a variety of theatrical disciplines—I approach enhanced hyphenated dramaturgy through my own directing lens. I am most interested in how dramaturgy-minded practitioners of all sorts can apply dramaturgical principles to their work, facilitating thoughtful, generative collaboration across processes. João Paulo Lucas says that dramaturgs are essential in allowing fruitful collaboration across disciplines by being capable of translating between their colleagues’ disparate modes of expression: “the dialogue about collaboration can be the plan (of fertilization, germination, and flow of ideas and representations) that precedes the composition, but which becoming already shelters its virtual existence,” (Lucas 2017, 24). This process starts with dramaturgs helping individuals—where Dramaturgs’ Network, an organization in the UK, describes dramaturgs as “member[s] of the creative team dedicated to help[ing] the makers find their own artistic journey through the process to fulfill their artistic vision”—and extends to them helping organize and clarify collaborative efforts (Katalin Trencsényi qtd. in Sigal 2014, 186).

With a mind towards “research and thoughtful text analysis,” which Gay believes “are gifts that keep on giving from the beginning of the process onwards” (Gay 2014, 215)—and a commitment to “interrogate the process of creation [...] *and also play with her colleagues*,” as Applebaum says (emphasis hers) (Applebaum 2014, 198-99)—theatre makers of every discipline can benefit from folding the best parts of dramaturgy into their practices. By approaching design work, prep, and rehearsal processes with this sort of “dramaturgical sensibility,” to borrow from Geoffrey Proehl—“a kind of awareness that is as much felt as thought” (2011, 17)—practitioners of all varieties, including directors, can use dramaturgy to empower themselves and their colleagues. Through a dramaturgy of care—the practice of slowing down, of striving to create extra space for collaboration and discussion during and around rehearsals, of deliberately recognizing what we each bring to the work, and of integrating deep text analysis and research with staging, collaboration in design work, and discussions around choreography—theatre makers can foster “a deep and authentic connection to the work,” as Gay (2014, 216) encourages, and a greater “care for [its] overall process and clarity,” Applebaum’s highest dramaturgical priority (2014, 200).

Theory Into Practice

During our production of *Lost Girl* at American University, I was just an “assistant director”—not a choreographer, designer, or an official dramaturg. Like dramaturgy, assistant directing can span a wide variety of duties, almost all of which I dipped into: overlapping with Brecht’s observational note-takers, attending rehearsals and production meetings, working with understudies (on productions that use them)—and serving as a catch-all for the errands and duties the director, stage management team, or others don’t have time for. Taking a “dramaturgy of care” approach to all these duties propelled me to also explore our show’s creative potential more deeply, championing new ways to understand and embody Belflower’s script throughout our process. From my assistant director position, I urged our creative team¹ to appreciate that paying attention to histories, both personal and political—of the *Peter Pan* canon, Belflower’s text, members of the artistic ensemble, and the societal forces that shape us—can deepen every aspect of our work. From early production meetings and prep to closing, I worked to integrate the principles central to a dramaturgy of care—making time for text analysis, research, discussions, and cross-role collaboration—into as much of our work as I could, from the team’s casting process and design choices to our rehearsals, table work, and building character relationships. Aided by this approach, we were able to devise key details of the play’s magical realism and explore each character’s motivations in response to—and inspired by—everyday realities. This created a richer world for our actors to inhabit, deepening their experiences and performances; it enriched the creative team’s experience; and it had ripple effects on our audiences.

This dramaturgical intervention began with casting and establishing character relationships. In my prep, I discovered that many adaptations of J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*—the stage play *Peter Pan; or, the Boy Who Wouldn’t Grow Up* (Barrie 1904); the novel *Peter and Wendy* (Barrie 1911); the animated *Peter Pan* film (Luske 1953); the Disney live-action film *Hook* (Spielberg 1991); and the 2003 live-action film *Peter Pan* (Hogan 2003)—suggest that the Darling children, Lost Girls, and Lost Boys came to Neverland after Peter arrived at their windows and offered to sweep them away. This begs pivotal questions for each character: When Peter came to their window, what did he offer them? Why did they leave?

From there, I moved into deeper text analysis. Belflower says that Wendy left because the first time she saw Peter, he shone “with a holy light” (Belflower 2019, 23), “like he was the only person in the world” (40). But Wendy’s mother clarifies Wendy had been “at That Age” when Peter

came, the age “when everything changes, when everything matters” so “anything that happens—it’s bigger than it would have been before, than it will be after” (9). Mother joins a chorus, alluding to puberty: It “starts around the time you stop wearing bows in your hair” (9), she says, and A, B, and C—characters who, in part, externalize Wendy’s inner thoughts—agree: “It was around the time I stopped caring if my shoes were comfortable” (47), and “around the time candy started hurting my stomach” (26). Wendy even begins the play by saying: “It was around the time I stopped thinking that staying up late was a victory” (7). Peter found Wendy when she was most predisposed to idealize him—the age when “Boys make big promises. Girls know better than to believe them, but they go along with them anyway,” as she puts it (12), later reflecting: “Before I saw him, I was making him up” (98). But she diverts from this narrative in a crucial way, piquing my interests in feminism and queer positivity: Wendy wanted more than to promise herself to the quintessential boy, to appreciate *his* light. She “wanted him to see—there is a world inside me, too [...] a world that has nothing to do with him” (40-41).

In parallel, Slightly’s super-objective was to get the people he loves, particularly Wendy, to see him how he sees himself. While Peter’s love for Wendy seemed focused on the *image* of her, Slightly loved Wendy the *person*—the “world inside [her]” (Belflower 2019, 41). It is romantically motivated, but his persistent presence and determination to serve as her life raft despite her partial rejection points to a commitment deeper than romance alone. Despite that, Wendy’s conflict over those romantic feelings is one of the driving forces of the play. Slightly’s motivation to go to Neverland is never stated explicitly, but I saw possibility: what if, when Peter came to Slightly’s window, Slightly presented as a little girl and Peter offered him a chance to be something else? To define himself? To be a “Lost *Boy*”? And what if this queer-rooted origin is one reason why Wendy struggles so much over her feelings for Slightly?

Considering these insights and my suggestion that a woman or non-binary actor be cast as Slightly, our director decided to double-cast our production.² Accordingly, he created two distinct companies, all the roles doubled except for Boy—Wendy’s brief, mid-play boyfriend—and Peter Pan. In care for each other and the work, the casts rehearsed together, learned from each other, and supported the text’s core messages as a team; meanwhile, each cast was allowed, even encouraged, to develop their own versions of the story. In one cast, Wendy was played by Sirra F., a black woman, and Slightly was played by Max B., a trans, Jewish, Autistic man; and in the other cast, Wendy and Slightly were played by Abby A. and Emma A., both white women.^{2,3} We built out the

nuances of the Wendy/Slightly dynamics, pillars of the play, from there. Neither of our Slightly's were played by cisgender men, Abby-Wendy was juxtaposed against Emma's female-bodied Slightly, and—further supporting Belflower's original charge on casting—our Wendys were two different races.

As we entered rehearsals, I used design elements and staging to create visual language grounded in careful research, Belflower's text, and purposeful discussions from production meetings and rehearsals. From there, I explored questions informed by our new interpretation of the text, in which Neverland is a queer space where traditional rules are suspended. Fairy dances, pirate ships and mermaid lagoons are real; time is dilated; shadows are literally alive; kisses are everything from a spot at the corner of the mouth to acorns, thimbles and strawberries; Peter can choose not to grow up; it snows whenever he's gone; and everyone, including Slightly and the other "Lost Boys," can escape regular social norms and pressures. Such interpretation led to a crucial question: In such a Neverland, what are the limits of that suspension? What motivates those limits?

Early in the play, we learn that Wendy rescued the Lost Boys from Neverland, and it heavily implies that no one (including Peter) was taking proper care of them before she got there and tried to do so. In an interview at the world premiere, Belflower revealed that: "In Neverland, the land of forgetting, Wendy was tasked with remembering. She remembered all the things boys didn't have time for: bedtime stories, taking medicine," (Belflower qtd. in Lawler 2018). Lawler highlights that "This points to the emotional labor many women take on in their relationships" (Lawler 2018), and further—in my text analysis, Wendy is at least partly beholden to the maternal labor that has been historically demanded of her socially constructed gender (A. Kaplan 1998, Halberstam 2007, Weinbaum 2007). I carried this awareness into rehearsals, which informed how I approached discussions with both our Wendys. For both, care needed to be taken to understand that queerness has been punished across the board for centuries, and for Abby-Wendy, I was aware that white women have been historically conscripted into upholding heteropatriarchal narratives within the domestic sphere (A. Kaplan 1998, Engels 1884, Somerville 2007). Taken together with Wendy's interactions with Slightly in the script, this insight helped the artistic team decide that even in her role as the group's de-facto leader, Abby-Wendy had been a closeted queer person with feelings for Emma-Slightly—who was played by a woman and costumed androgynous-female—for quite some time. Our intimacy choreographer, Carrie Edick, carefully incorporated the

pressures of homophobia—and sapphic love languages, such as gazes and soft touches—into the choreography, and we worked together to incorporate it into rehearsal discussions. Directionally in specific moments, we aimed to illustrate Wendy’s internal conflict—which was beautifully constructed through physical and vocal pacing, hesitation, and jumpiness vs. stillness, particularly in response to Slightly’s touch—and Edick incorporated it in the choreography.

For Slightly, the dramaturgical study and much of the tablework we made time for expanded from a moment in Wendy and Slightly’s final scene together: Slightly tells Wendy that the Nursery—Wendy’s bedroom—was “the happiest place [he’d] ever been,” and that it was “better” than Neverland, even with “all [Neverland’s] magic” (Belflower 2019, 93). Understanding each Slightly’s feelings about this required a careful examination of their possible experiences with transphobia, gender dysphoria, and misogyny. Slightly’s love for the Nursery is strange considering how important affirmation and support are to LGBTQ+ youth—particularly trans, non-binary, and gender nonconforming people—if we imagine Neverland as Slightly’s first site of gender self-signification. Thus, we discussed with the actors: Why was the Nursery better than Neverland? How much might Slightly have been pushed into feminized caring roles in Neverland in relation to the other Lost Boys? Did Peter ever fully recognize Max-Slightly’s masculinity or Emma-Slightly’s androgyny, or did he slot Slightly into a mothering role before he brought Wendy there? We created a caring rehearsal environment that considered the actors’ thoughts on this, and in turn, these questions informed both Slightlys’ bitterness towards Peter—giving them additional emotional fuel and a more interesting motivations than jealousy to draw from.

Centering collaboration and care, Sirra and Max’s experiences—Sirra’s as a black woman playing Wendy and Max as an Autistic, trans man playing Slightly—informed many of the choices made in the choreography as they worked in close collaboration with our intimacy choreographer, Carrie Edick. Their insights enriched and guided the dramaturgical research. Through both, we cultivated an awareness of the high rates of violence black women face and the pressures placed on them to be performatively ‘strong,’ ideas which informed our understanding of the constant, explicit pressure that the ensemble exerts on Wendy to defend her emotions and way of being (Crenshaw 1991, Donovan and West 2015, Green 2017, S. Kaplan 2007). Additionally, Max-Slightly’s knowledge of these forces and Max’s trans experience grounded Max-Slightly’s potential as a masculine presence to either ground and protect or to threaten Sirra-Wendy. In our collaborative rehearsal space, Sirra connected powerfully with Wendy’s desire to tell her own story

in response to the pressures she faced; and Max made his physical presence small, his touch cautious, and his demeanor gentle—in contrast with the Boy and Peter’s more aggressive physicality—for the bulk of the action. This brought extra weight to each moment of touch and elevated presence between them: Slightly gently wiping firefly juice on her face, his substitute for fairy dust, before admitting his feelings out loud for the first time; stepping towards her and speaking explosively when he discovers she’s still chasing Peter (and destroying herself); grounding her by taking her hands and guiding her in a deep breath during a panic attack she has; and holding her when she kisses him. Finally, Max’s experience with Autism informed Max-Slightly’s frustrations with Sirra-Wendy—Max-Slightly struggled extra hard to understand the social dynamics of why Sirra-Wendy wouldn’t see him romantically or move on from Peter.

Belflower’s stage directions suggest that, for Wendy, Slightly represents “the certainty of the ground,” and this was true for both our Slightlys (Belflower 2019, 92). Max-Slightly represented a more literal haven for Wendy—Sirra-Wendy’s romantic hesitation towards him was grounded in a more general fear of vulnerability and a fear of moving on. Their queer storytelling was rooted in their mutual reckonings with transformation, and in their struggles to truly see and be seen by one another. But because in Emma and Abby’s portrayal, a romance with Slightly also read as sapphic, we took care to layer the pressures of internalized homophobia into Abby-Wendy’s resistance—where Slightly represented both the threat of having to face that desire and the safety and thrill that only comes from embracing it. Therefore, Emma-Slightly had more assertive body language—challenging Wendy as much as caring for her. Through intimacy choreography, addressing these various nuances meant carefully grounding moments in two pieces of dialogue: Wendy’s sense of safety residing in her upper arms, and her specifically romantic associations with hand-holding as shown throughout the play.

In an early scene, Wendy talks to Mother about the reliability of sadness in a tumultuous world: “Sadness stays. It’s study, and it’s strong. *It burrows into your shoulder—it stays all night*” (emphasis mine) (Belflower 2019, 18). In that scene, A, B, and C gathered around her as she speaks. To highlight her feelings visually, A held Wendy’s upper-right arm, nestling into her shoulder. Later, A, B, and C monologue Wendy’s feelings about hand-holding in direct address to the audience: “[Peter’s] hands were the first hands I ever held in that special way [...] that gives you butterflies [...] All those feelings inside. Just from hands” (Belflower 2019, 40-41). As they spoke, we had them hold each other’s hands. This choreography was then echoed as motifs during

the Wendy-Slightly kiss; as Abby-Wendy panicked, Emma-Slightly breathed with her as she held her with a muscle-level grip to her upper-right arm where A held before, and then slid down her arm into holding her hand as a means of grounding and calming her. The arm-hold referenced the safety Wendy rarely feels but can with Slightly in that moment, and the hand-hold mixed with sustained eye contact was the last straw that freed her suppressed desire, activating the kiss. Not only was this a moment of embodied care between Slightly and Wendy, but was planned, choreographed, and rehearsed with consent-forward care for the actors, and research, collaboration-forward care for the dialogue, characters, and political forces that shape them.

In caring for both the characters' personal histories and the actors' investment in our world, we also involved props in our dramaturgical directing efforts. We did this through the design and staging of two key props: the jar of fireflies used when Slightly first admits to feelings for Wendy (Appendix A); and a homemade fox stuffed animal, Slightly's keepsake from Neverland, that we put in several scenes (Appendix B). Creating these props was a collaborative process. For the firefly jar, I proposed the tech, materials, and research in a plan I illustrated (Appendix A), and that influenced what our scenic designer, Gavin Mosier, brought to life with his team. Then, for the fox stuffed animal, I collaborated with Max and Emma on its design and backstory, presented another illustrated proposal to the design team (Appendix C), and crafted the fox myself from materials our costume designer, Ash Ludwig, collaborated with me to curate—fabrics from Peter's clothing (Appendix B). From there, we went to work tying the props into our staging.

Both materially and figuratively, the firefly jar provided structure, inspiration, and a sense of magic to its scene, especially in Emma and Abby's portrayal. In our care towards integrating sapphic love languages in their choreography, when Emma-Slightly wiped firefly juice on Abby-Wendy's cheeks, I had Abby sit in that moment—Emma-Slightly cradling her face—before pulling away, illustrating the possibility Wendy is tempted by (Appendix D). Then, later in the scene, when Slightly asks, "Have you ever Thought about it? Thought about me?" and Wendy answers, "You know too much. There's nowhere to hide" (Belflower 2019, 61), we had several discussions about how Slightly reads that—as an admission: Emma-Slightly steps closer to her, uplifting Belflower's stage directions, while answering, "I think that's a good thing," (Belflower 2019, 62). In doing so, Emma-Slightly stepped into the hope of it—again highlighting the stakes in their relationship. By taking extra care and time with our analyses, tablework, choreography, and rehearsals, we were

able to use the firefly jar prop as a jumping-off point to collaboratively deepen this important moment.

The fox stuffed animal (Appendix B, C) functioned similarly, both caring for the characters—their backstories and relationship—and providing extra emotional fuel for the actors. Originally, this prop came from our director’s thought that all the Lost Boys should have at least one special keepsake from Neverland; the fox became Slightly’s. When Emma, Max and I were designing it, we played with the ambiguity of their Neverland adventures, discussing Slightly’s favorite animal, soothing fidgets (partly informed by Max’s autism insights), and river stones kept because they resembled Wendy’s eyes. Then, to deepen Wendy and Slightly’s history, I decided that in the world of the play, Wendy had made the fox herself, as a gift for Slightly. Transitioning into staging, we deliberately integrated the fox in key moments throughout the show. In both versions, when Wendy greeted each Lost Boy onstage for the first time as A, B and C narrated as gossiping townspeople, we had Slightly hold the stuffed animal—Max-Slightly and Sirra-Wendy exchanging timid smiles, and Emma-Slightly and Abby-Wendy flirtatious grins. After that, in both versions of the Lost Boys’ first scene in the Nursery, we had Slightly enter with it, setting it gently on the bench that doubles as Wendy’s bed—visible for the rest of the show. Purposefully, it was the only toy the Lost Boys didn’t throw into packing boxes that scene.

Then, in Abby and Emma’s version, towards the beginning of Wendy and Slightly’s last scene together (which ends in their kiss), they both hurriedly packed other nursery items—and I had Abby-Wendy encounter it. She held it, took it in, and looked back to watch Emma-Slightly packing on the other side of the room. When we staged this, we knew the prop was small—whether the audience knew or could see its full details was beside our point. Instead, the moment was for Wendy—to ground Abby in their history just before the climax of their arc, and to authentically cue Wendy into this turning point in confronting her feelings. For both Abby-Wendy/Emma-Slightly and Sirra-Wendy/Max-Slightly, the fox added a touchstone of truth and history the actors could draw on whenever they liked, a dramaturgically informed piece designed to deepen their world and add opportunities for nuanced performance. As I put it to all four actors—Emma, Max, Abby and Sirra—the first day I brought it to rehearsals: “Whatever else happens, you *know* Wendy loves you, because she made you this.”

Closing Thoughts

My journey with *Lost Girl* started because of my background: I was a kid who needed someone to look deeper. But as Belflower said in her original playwright's note: "I write for and about young people because there is so much life in-between. Because of those feelings. Because of that search for light. Because the things we experience at that age are real, and they matter," (Belflower, qtd. in Lawler 2018). As young people ourselves, our cast, many of our crew and I honored this spirit by bringing our personal histories, insights, and knowledge to the work. Through the team's choices in casting, worldbuilding, staging, intimacy choreography, design and direction, our dramaturgy-forward efforts at care and collaboration advanced Belflower's mission. We demonstrated dramaturgy's power to enhance every step of the theatrical process. We did so for our enrichment as creatives and people, and to deepen our work—but I believe it affected audiences, too. In her article, "On Performance and the Dramaturgy of Caring," Rebecca Groves writes that "by coming to care, we are commanded by the imperative to continue to recognize and critically affirm the commitments we have accrued thereby," and even after audience members leave the theatre, "the experience of having cared for a time and our care about caring itself motivate us to seek new worthy ends" (Groves 2017, 318). I will never know for sure if our audiences noticed that fox stuffed animal, the nuances of our staging and Edick's choreography, or the queerness we read into Wendy and Slightly's stories. But the journey impacted those of us involved. Inspired by my research in preparation for this show, our production meetings and rehearsals, the performances we put on, and the care we showed each other, I finished *Lost Girl* using different pronouns than I started with. I believe those words matter, that representation matters—that everything we did matters. That in a world designed to shut people down, we have an imperative to slow down and dig deeper—to care enough to fight for every moment of vulnerability and complication we can. That because we gave audiences and our company alike the chance to care for a closeted or racially oppressed Wendy, or a genderqueer Slightly longing for recognition, the work we did was worth it.

As directors, dramaturgs, and perhaps all theatre people know well, our work moves so fast, it is often difficult to stop—to make time and space for deep conversations, extra research, or talking about what our experiences bring to the work (and vice versa). But as Theatrical Intimacy Education advocates, "Better is Better" (TIE qtd. in Cobb 2022, 31), and I believe that embracing a dramaturgy of care in our work serves to make our processes better. Whatever profession(s) we

may approach a project from, any efforts we make to integrate a dramaturgy of care—that of deliberation and collaboration—into our practices will enrich the work. As Peter says near the end of Belflower’s play, “Everything matters, Wendy. I learned that from you” (Belflower 2019, 106).

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² Note on Identity and Consent: All four actors whose views on tablework are discussed—Abby A., Emma A., Max B., and Sirra F. (in alphabetical order)—were given an advanced copy of this piece before publication. They gave consent for the author to share their first names/last initials, the identities discussed in the article, and their thoughts from rehearsals. Abby and Emma also gave consent for their photo to be included.

³ For the remainder of the text, I refer to these four actors as follows (in alphabetical order): Abby A.’s Wendy as “Abby-Wendy,” Emma A.’s Slightly as “Emma-Slightly,” Max B.’s Slightly as “Max-Slightly,” and Sirra F.’s Wendy as “Sirra-Wendy.”

Appendix A



Fig. 1. Firefly Jar. My design proposal for Slightly and Wendy's fireflies scene.

Alt Text:

An image of the design proposal I made for Slightly and Wendy's "fireflies" scene. On the left side of the image, there's a diagram of a mason jar, the left half of which shows the outside of the jar with purple UV string lights wrapped around it. The right side of the jar shows what's on the inside—a battery pack taped to the inside wall, and UV blacklight neon fluorescent body-paint pooled on the bottom. On the right side of the image, there's a title that reads "Slightly's Fireflies" in a decorative, green font, below which is a description of the dramaturgical research/text analysis that went into this scene. The text reads: "Wendy and Slightly's 'Fireflies' scene (p. 52-56) is significant to the overall plot of the play, the growth of the Wendy/Slightly relationship, and to both Wendy and Slightly's individual character development. In the scene, the cracks deepen in Wendy's 'pretending' (p. 90), in her internal resistance to Slightly—to moving on, allowing herself new definition and safety, and accepting these feelings she has—and in her efforts to obfuscate those feelings using Peter. For Slightly, it's yet another moment of internal conflict: they are pulled between their honest desire to honor, help, protect and believe Wendy, and a complex desperation—longing, sometimes bitter, always sincere—to *really be seen* by her. With this prop, what literally makes the stage magic work is when UV lights are held close enough to this type of body paint, they activate its luminescence. But in the moment, it will seem like the closeness between Wendy and Slightly is what activates the magic. At the same time, the source of that magic, the jar, is what separates

them—Wendy's quest for Peter and Neverland still stands between them, for now. [sparkle] NB: Slightly uses 'they/them' here because we have one she/her & one he/him-using actor for the role. Also, there are intriguing opportunities to explore queering and complicating the gender dynamics between Wendy and Slightly, and Slightly and Peter (and the other 'Lost Boys') in Neverland and afterwards. *Prop Description:* An opaque, wide-mouthed jar with UV lights wrapped around the outside of it. Battery housing for lights is taped to inside wall of jar; lights feed out the opening. Body paint that glows under UV light is in the bottom of the jar, enough to dip fingers into. Slightly puts their hand in the jar, dips some paint, and gently paints Wendy's face. When they hold the jar up (and only when the jar prop is present), the paint glows on both their skin. After this scene, the jar will be gone and the paint will be unobtrusive (almost invisible) for the rest of the show, after which it's water-based and can be easily removed with warm water and soap or basic cleaning products (like any stage makeup)." Below this text, there's a drawing of Wendy and Slightly, a line of yellow paint glowing against her brown skin as Slightly applies it with a thumb, holding the jar between them.

Appendix B



Fig. 2. Proposal for fox stuffed animal. My design proposal for the fox stuffed animal we used to ground many of Wendy and Slightly’s scenes.

Alt Text

An image of the design proposal I made for Slightly’s special keepsake from Neverland, a fox stuffed animal sewn by Wendy. The background is a soft cream color, like a map. On the left side, there are two illustrations of the stuffed animal—a front and back view. The front view depicts the fox’s white, triangle ears; soft, orange face; brown, rock eyes, stitched on with black thread that forms its pupils; green pine-needle whiskers and a red rock nose, sewn on with tan thread; orange, cylindrical body and black arms and legs, four little sacks sewn onto its bottom and sides. The back view includes the fox’s tail, which is made of two sticks crossed in an “x” shape, attached to the back with orange yarn in such a way that the “x” can be spun like a fidget toy. A drawing of three rocks is notated with the caption: “Rocks the color of Wendy’s eyes, found on an adventure” and “rock nose.” Between the ears on the back view, a caption reads: “Cloth and thread cut from Peter’s weathered clothes.” Drawings of a leaf and a pine branch are captioned: “Body, head, hands and feet stuffed with leaves of various textures, making it a satisfyingly crunchy fidget toy” and “pine-needle whiskers.” On the right side of the image, the words “Neverland Treasures” are written in stylized blue, and “SLIGHTLY” is written in green below that. A block of text then reads: “Each of the Lost Boys has a keepsake from Neverland: a special

object they found, made, or loved there. For Slightly's, we came up with a story where their original special objects were two round rocks they found, kept because they're the color of Wendy's eyes. Wendy heard Slightly mention this once. After that, she made a plan, and one night, when she couldn't sleep, she put this little stuffed animal together from some of Peter's old clothing. A fox because red foxes are Slightly's favorite animal (and a subtle reference/fun Easter egg to Slightly's costume in the original 'Peter Pan' Disney cartoon), it is made of fidgets she knows Slightly likes—crunchy leaves for stuffing, a soothing texture and satisfying sound when squeezed; sticks for a tail that are tied so they can be twisted/spun around; pine needle whiskers that at first, at least, had a nice smell. And, the final touch: she took the rocks he saved for her eyes and made them the fox's. When Slightly woke up the next morning, they panicked at first, the rocks lost—then found this on their pillow. Wendy was gone, on a 'solo adventure' with Peter, but they caught her grin when they were fidgeting with it later and knew what she had done. This item incorporates Slightly's attachment to Peter, their self-driven love for Wendy, and Wendy loving even back then that Slightly really notices *her.* (NB: They/Them pronouns used to cover any & all Slightlys.) Concept and Story by Max B., Emma A., Fiona Rose Murphey. Illustrations by Fiona Rose Murphey.”

Appendix C



Fig. 3. Finished fox stuffed animal. The finished product after I hand-crafted the fox stuffed animal we used to ground several of Wendy and Slightly’s important scenes. I crafted it from rocks and leaves, fabric from Peter’s costumes, and a scarf made from scraps of Slightly’s costume, curating the materials with our costume designer. Pictured left in my home, right on our set.

Alt Text

Two photographs of the fox stuffed animal described in figure two. On the left, a front-view shot of the fox on a table with a blue tablecloth, a Sharpie sitting behind it and a striped, blue scarf—made from a piece of Slightly’s outfit—around its neck. In the final product, its hands and feet are grey, its belly and neck white, its back and face a soft orange, its ears black-and-white striped in front, its pine needle whiskers attached with a knot of grey yarn, and its brown-rock eyes sewn on with grey thread. On the right, a back-view shot of the fox sitting on a wooden chair on the “Lost Girl” set. The backs of its ears are a plaid-material reddish-brown and its twig-propeller tail is attached with a bundle of grey yarn.

Appendix D



Fig. 4. Wendy's internal conflict. A photo of one of my proudest bits of direction, from the scene in which Slightly wipes fireflies on Wendy's face and Wendy sits in the moment before pulling back. Captured during our invited dress rehearsal. Abby A. as Wendy Darling, left, and Emma A. as Slightly, right. Photo credit Kelsey Walker.

Alt Text

A photograph of Abby-Wendy and Emma-Slightly sitting in front of the window in Wendy's Nursery, where Peter first met and took her away as a child. Cardboard packing boxes are scattered about the space. The window's left shutter, on Wendy's side of the bench, is open—at this point in the play, Wendy still hopes Peter will return. Wendy sits facing Slightly, her hands folded on her knee. A small camping lantern full of yellow twinkle lights—our design team's representation of the jar of "fireflies"—sits between them, and between them and the window, on the bench. In a romantic gesture, Slightly gently cradles Wendy's face in her hands, wiping "firefly juice" on Wendy's cheeks as Wendy looks into her eyes.

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