

PALGRAVE STUDIES IN THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE HISTORY

# CHILD LABOR IN THE BRITISH VICTORIAN ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

1875–1914

*Dyan Colclough*



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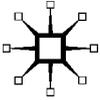
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*For Tony, Christian, Adam, Louis, Nathan and  
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Final thoughts are reserved, though, for those many thousands of girls and boys who tapped, pirouetted, acted, and sang their way through countless performances. This book pays tribute to their talent, hard work, physical endurance, emotional investment, hopes, and dreams.

# Introduction

This book explores and evaluates the contribution of theatrical child labor to the success of commercially provided, performance-based leisure during the period 1875–1914. I was originally drawn to this subject area by insights gained from my personal involvement in the entertainment industry as a chaperone to children who worked within the film and theatre industries. I was licensed to act as *loco parentis* to child performers who were younger than 16 years of age. My initial research was driven by an awareness of the juxtaposition of attitudes toward and management of child performers in the workplace and the ways that the general public respond to these children. It became clear that child performers were/are an exclusive group who straddle the two worlds of entertainment and work, and that this dichotomy presents the child with problems, benefits, choices, and experiences unique to performing children. It also became clear that the *real* child becomes lost within the artistic priorities of writers and directors allied to audience engagement with the *characters* portrayed. My initial intention was to undertake a contemporary study but before embarking on work that focused on modern-day performers I sought to contextualize the experience of contemporary children. On turning to the history books to frame my study I discovered that the history of British child performers as a workforce had been largely overlooked. Moreover, it soon became clear that readily available source material relating to child performers was thin, and there was little evidence that gave direct access to the experiences of the children themselves. I came to believe that the most important and valuable contribution I could make to this area of history was to capture the earliest living voices of child performers while they were still available. During the 1990s I set about locating, corresponding with, and interviewing a number of individuals who shared their experiences of performing as children in the 1920s and 1930s. Interpretation of these interwar voices demonstrated the inadequacy of past legislation introduced to protect stage-children from exploitation, which had a resonance in terms of my own more recent experience within the industry.<sup>1</sup> This led

## 2 *Child Labor in the British Victorian Entertainment Industry*

me to question assumptions about the success of nineteenth-century legislation in outlawing child labor. Enthused by my findings and perturbed by an obvious shortfall in historiography I became keen to explore the lives of nineteenth-century child performers for whom protective laws had first been formulated. The study shows that for almost 30 years the Victorian performance-based entertainment industry was dependent on child labor as a key factor in its evolution, prosperity, and success. In demonstrating this, the book highlights the extent to which the significance of this substantial and important sector of child labor has been largely overlooked in historiographies of both childhood and performance. This work acknowledges the value of the few existing studies produced between 1981 and 2014 for their rare contribution to this field of study.

An article by Tracy Davis first alerted me to Brian Crozier's unpublished thesis.<sup>2</sup> Crozier examines the dialogue and content of late Victorian dramatic productions to explore the change in attitudes that underlay contemporary interest in childhood. He concludes that portrayal through the drama reinforced the new construction of childhood and that this coincided with increasing protective and educational legislation for children. He shows that within melodrama the presentation of the child as a victim of poverty and deprivation that dominated the 1870s, was transformed during the 1880s to one that constructed the child as representative of working-class humor and vitality. Crozier demonstrates a switch from the portrayal of children as pathetic creatures, to one that evoked sentimentality among the audience.<sup>3</sup>

Crozier's study examines notions of childhood through stage-child *characters* whereas this work will focus on the *actual* children employed to portray those roles. Comparison of my approach and Crozier's approach reveals that the industry's desire to satisfy audience appetite for ideal representations of childhood made heavy demands on theatrical child labor. Paradoxically, child performers were unable to experience what could be termed the "blueprint of childhood" they created on stage, which was shaped by legislation, philanthropy, and commercial enterprise. The public persona of the stage-child helped to promote, publicize, and sell late Victorian notions of childhood. In order for this to be achieved, the private persona of the theatrical child was compromised and its labor exploited. Crozier's work is valuable in developing an understanding of attitudes toward children and the evolution of the notion of childhood and is useful as a measure of the increased demand for and supply of theatrical children. However, it simultaneously underlines my argument regarding the extent to which child performers have, as *real* children,

remained largely undocumented, and demonstrates the need for appropriate research to address this deficiency. Tracy Davis first provided a published insight into the actual children behind the roles they played on stage.<sup>4</sup> Davis briefly touched upon recruitment, training, education, and economic issues relating to theatrical children, highlighting what she identified as the positive and negative aspects of theatrical child work. She also outlined late nineteenth-century debates and legislation concerning theatrical child employment and their effects. As a pioneering study, Davis's work has offered a springboard for further research, including my own. Although she did not pursue this aspect of theatre history, making only fleeting reference to theatrical children in her subsequent major works, her knowledge about performing as a business has enriched and furthered my own research and helped me to contextualize the child's place within this labor market.<sup>5</sup>

Hazel Waters has also drawn attention to the place of children in the mid-Victorian theatre, focusing attention on child prodigies. This work, by her own admission, is speculative because she found source material to be "scattered and fragmentary."<sup>6</sup> The period covered by Waters lies, in the main, outside my chosen timescale but her thought-provoking work allowed me to raise new questions that led to fresh sources. Insights gained from these challenge her contention that the fashion for child prodigies was over by 1886.<sup>7</sup> Carolyn Steedman's chapter concerning stage-children, understandably, draws heavily on Davis's original account but develops this to include a detailed description of the debates around the employment of theatrical child labor during the late nineteenth century. Again this proved illuminating. Steedman's emphasis is weighted toward perceptions of childhood rather than on the actual experiences of the child. Nevertheless, her work provided a new framework for the exploration of what motivated audiences to watch children perform, and this helped with my interpretation of new evidence uncovered by my own research.

Pamela Horn's analysis of theatrical children also builds on Davis's findings.<sup>8</sup> Previous studies have tended to conflate legislative advances with social change in accepting that the passing of laws to regulate child labor automatically implied their successful implementation. This assumption has led to much emphasis being placed on the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act of 1889 as a watershed in the regulation of theatrical child labor. Horn presents a more focused analysis than previously offered and takes into account the possibility that this law was limited and allowed possibilities for the continued illegal employment of theatrical children. My research not only substantiates Horn's claim but also shows this practice

to have been far more enduring and to have concerned much larger numbers of children than her conservative estimate. Each chapter of this book reveals a different group of individuals that had a vested interest in the continued employment of child performers and shows a number of ways in which child employment and education laws were evaded and avoided in order to sustain supply and demand.

Madame Katti Lanner was one the largest purveyors of Victorian child performers. This book draws on Lanner's contribution to the increased supply of and continued demand for child performers. Jane Pritchard provides a rare insight into Lanner's copious work as a choreographer of the poplar ballet. This was enlightening and suggested questions that could only be addressed by further research. As shown below, child protective legislation did not affect Lanner's business to the extent that has previously been claimed.<sup>9</sup> Lanner, like others with a vested interest in the continued presence of children in theatres, was adept in evasion, and evidence supports my argument that Lanner continued to successfully train theatrical children and remained a regular and profuse supplier of theatrical child labor to theatres across the nation and abroad up until her death in 1906.

Shauna Vey's research on the situation of nineteenth-century child performers in America has proved enlightening and valuable. Her research has enabled me to identify the parallel experiences and treatment of British and American children who were employed to entertain. This has brought a new perspective to my evaluation and analysis of certain primary sources that hailed the American system as one to be emulated in Britain.<sup>10</sup>

The key most single influential work in the study of performing children in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was published in 1884 by author, philanthropist, and theatrical missionary Ellen Barlee.<sup>11</sup> Barlee's work is noteworthy for its inclusion of the previously elusive voices of children. Subsequent academics, alerted by Davis's first mention of this publication, have cited this author. However, none to date have challenged Barlee's interpretations. Alexandra Carter's contribution concerns the theatrical employment of older girls. In places, resonant of both Barlee and Davis's work, Carter focuses on a very specific period, 1892–99. Using the device of a journal, she aims to present an account of the industry by documenting the experiences of, what she regards as, a typical young ballet dancer. Carter's methodology can be viewed as problematic because Cara Tranders is a fictional character whose dialogue Carter uses as a tool to link evidence derived from novelists, lyricists, critics, and historians.<sup>12</sup> Carter's work though is based on primary sources and has been useful to my research insofar as it offers an interesting and evocative account of

stage labor as it might have been seen through the eyes of the performer herself. This said Tranders' "experience" is not necessarily representative of a diverse workforce that cuts across both age and class and as such does not advance the historiography of nationwide labor force of Victorian child performers.

Jim Davis's study of nineteenth-century child performers focuses on how audiences responded to performances of Shakespearian roles enacted by children.<sup>13</sup> Davis's work was particularly useful in confirming my assertion of the need for further investigation into the role of theatrical representation in the construction and invention of nineteenth-century childhood.<sup>14</sup> His study also prompted me to look beyond the experiences of child stars and search for the life experiences of jobbing child performers who comprised the mass of the British workforce of children who were employed to entertain.

The broadest contribution to the historiography of British Victorian child performers comes from Anne Varty who in 2008 provided the first monograph to explore the topic.<sup>15</sup> This innovative study provided much food for thought in determining the path taken by my own research. The detailed backdrop painted by her far-reaching work is underpinned by a profusion of primary sources. Varty has provided an unprecedented opportunity for academic discussion of this neglected area of British history. From this I have been able to contextualize my arguments and present new theoretical concepts and new evidence to further the debate. Marah Gubar's work has enriched my understanding of the reasoning behind the formulation of a variety of fictional, Victorian child characters. Her detailed erudition has guided and supported my arguments about how and why childhood, as a newly recognized and distinct period in the life cycle, was both celebrated and revered in ways that were specific to the nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, catalysts of perceptions of childhood provided by Jennifer Sattaur have helped me to contextualize the space occupied by theatrical child employees within the psyche of British Victorian society.<sup>17</sup> Jeanne Klein's recent study has proved reassuring in that it shares the same premise that underpins the main argument to be presented here: "child actors commanded their own roles as an integral part of nineteenth-century theatre culture."<sup>18</sup> The recent research by Gillian Arrighi and Victor Emeljanow, and their subsequent edited collection of essays about child entertainers have not only identified a crucial need for further investigation but also have begun to fill this void. Their work has highlighted the timeliness for further research into children who were/are employed to entertain.<sup>19</sup>

I came to this field of study from a retrospective perspective, and this has proved advantageous. My earlier research into child performers of the 1920s and 1930s coupled with my knowledge of children working in the industry today provided the grounding and insight necessary to identify less obvious questions and gaps in our understanding. While offering a fresh interpretation of previously presented evidence, this study also identifies new primary sources and offers new analysis in this field. It is also intended that the work will provide a basis for future research, encourage interrogation of my arguments, and support the development of new questions that can be asked of the evidence.

As a relatively new and under-researched area of study, investigation into late Victorian theatrical child labor in Britain has proved problematic. In the absence of a fully established historiography it was not possible to implement a structured methodology. Therefore, my early research was largely uninformed, wide ranging, and necessarily painstaking. As such I have consulted and interpreted an extensive variety of historical sources, many of which subsequently required reinterpretation in the light of fresh evidence, developments in historiography, and under the influence of new concepts and theories. In this way, a genuinely reflective and reciprocal relationship developed among reading, research, and understanding, and this is visible in the interpretations offered. This process is evident also in the nature of the questions asked of contemporary material. My extensive research, allied to wide secondary reading generated new questions and answers and brought new perspectives to bear on my chosen topic.

This study is qualitative in approach. Research specifically related to the central question of this book revealed theatrical children to be an elusive workforce and difficult to pinpoint. Unlike those children targeted by social reformers earlier in the industrializing nineteenth century who were geographically or industrially concentrated, theatre children comprised a casual, scattered, and nomadic labor force. Additionally, performers were recruited from a number of different sources. Some belonged to established theatrical families and a number were hired through internal recruitment of the children of backstage workers. However, increasing demand for theatrical child labor outgrew this supply, and a progressively larger proportion were engaged from various training schools established for this specific purpose. Others were marketed by a growing number of independent agents. When huge numbers were required for pantomime, the traditional practice of advertising in the press and hiring at the stage-door continued, although this lessened as children became more central to the industry and preference for trained children increased.

The nature of late Victorian commercial theatre also presented problems for research. The industry operated, in equal measure, in both the worlds of business and leisure. Its backstage capitalist infrastructure and the public facade which the theatre presented to its consumers. Within this working environment theatrical child employees occupied two personas; the private backstage laborer and the public onstage performer. The latter regularly formed the antithesis of the former and was something the industry was keen to keep hidden from public scrutiny. This presented a key challenge. The real nature of stage work undertaken by children was deliberately hidden from public view by those with a vested interest in the continued employment of theatrical child labor. Setting aside occasional, yet invaluable, glimpses of the real children who worked in the industry, the only way of gaining access to the lived experience of the stage-child has been to closely examine the image sold by the contemporary industry and to detail the nature and implications of the work children actually did. Careful reading of the subtext in available sources has provided a means to measure the theatrical child's public and private experiences of childhood against late Victorian aspirational ideals of childhood, as promoted by the government and other agencies. This has made it possible to construct a detailed picture of theatrical child employment and to demonstrate that between 1875 and 1914, this child workforce made a significant contribution to the theatrical industry.

Within the wide range of sources that have been scrutinized in the research undertaken for this study, periodical literature has been extensively consulted. The use of nineteenth-century periodicals as historical source material is not unproblematic. The sheer scale of publication makes this sort of research daunting and even after necessary selection has been made, the actual exploration itself is incredibly time consuming. Also the very nature of journalistic evidence implies editing and selection. However, as shown in the following paragraphs, I have purposely incorporated this premise into my research and have used the weaknesses of this source material to strengthen my arguments.

The popularity and expansion of the theatrical industry spawned a massive growth in the publication of theatrical journals, the employees of which relied on the industry for their livelihoods.<sup>20</sup> Given that all things theatrical attracted wide readership, much space was also given over to the British stages in the general press. I have used the content of these publications in a variety of ways to show the importance of the industry in the late nineteenth-century economy and more specifically, the importance of children within this industry. My heavy reliance on periodicals and

newspapers has allowed me to demonstrate that selective reporting and editing, self-interest, and bias within the journalistic industry were the key factors that helped to fashion the public image of child performers and sustained their continued and often illegal employment.

Features about and interviews with popular child actors and actresses reveal much more than is intended by the text. Their self-promoting tone and boasting of vast, varied, and regular child performances inadvertently expose years of relentless and heavy working regimes for the children described. Additionally, from a careful reading of the industry's promotion of nationwide tours, it is possible to track and show the particularly demanding working schedule assigned to touring children who made up the most elusive sector of the theatrical child labor force. In the absence of any other statistics about touring children, this exercise, while essentially impressionistic, has proved particularly useful to my research.

Promotional literature and theatrical reviews have been especially illuminating not least because they invariably made special mention of any young members in the cast. Reviewers often expressed their amazement at the performances given by children with emphasis put on their ages, their numbers on stage, descriptions of the characters children represented, and their theatrical attire. Their popularity with the audience was also regularly alluded to in reviews. Theatrical listings allow an examination of the types and numbers of productions that included children and show a definite growth in their frequency. These and larger advertisements display the length of the run, the start and finishing times of performances, and the number of daily and weekly performances. This gives some indication of the weeks and months worked and what proportion of the child's working day was spent on call at the theatre and their late finishing hours. Advertisements also signal the growth in theatrical training establishments that points to a buoyant market in the supply of child performers. Editorial features, supposedly taking a "peep behind the scenes" invariably dwell on the self-sacrifice of managers and tutors of the performing arts who, in the name of art and as servants of the public, could never be off duty. However, declarations of the demands to themselves of constant regimes of training and rehearsing of performers fly in the face of their claims, which equated the work of theatrical children with a few hours of play on stage.

Although press coverage reflected the majority view that favored the industry's continued inclusion of child performers, a minority group identified theatrical children as laborers and called for an end to their

employment. The ensuing public debate was heavily weighted in favor of theatrical employers. Although newspaper coverage showing opposing views is limited, I have taken great pains to locate and include these in my analysis. In order to show as balanced a view as possible I have consulted a range of journalistic literature that is likely to sympathize with the minority view. These include less mainstream newspapers, the educational press, and publications from the National Vigilance Association that headed the anti-theatrical lobby.

Despite the scale of publicity and debate regarding late nineteenth-century theatrical children, apart from promotional journal interviews, the voices of the children themselves are seldom heard. Setting aside a rare glimpse of the child's perspective found in Ellen Barlee's study, it is apparent that enquirers and debaters failed to seek the opinion of theatrical child employees themselves.<sup>21</sup> In an attempt to compensate for the lack of children's testimony, I turned to autobiographical sources. The benefit and disadvantages of autobiography as a historical source are well documented, but it is useful to bear in mind factors that are distinct in autobiographies written by actresses from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who held a public persona to which they needed to conform.<sup>22</sup> It also must be considered how far celebrities, who were children in the Victorian age, were representative of the majority of "jobbing" child actors who made up the mass of this child workforce. Visual images have also proved to be especially evocative and important in a variety of ways, not least in reminding me that this project was originally driven by empathy and my witnessing of the experiences of more recent child actors.

None of the sources referred to above has been consulted in isolation. Evaluation and analyses have been carried out in conjunction with a wide range of additional material. These include government enquiries and reports, parliamentary debates in both the houses of Lords and Commons, and child laws all of which concerned the theatrical employment of children and provide an official perspective.<sup>23</sup> The originality of this study has dictated that my research was positioned within the experiences of British child performers, and in the main, research has focused on London's theatrical child workforce. As the nucleus of the entertainment industry, the capital city was the largest employer of theatrical children and was also the base for the campaign that called for an end to their employment. However, this work also reveals the use of theatrical child labor to have been a nationwide phenomenon.

## DISCUSSION

Discussion takes place within two broad and well documented historiographies. The first is the commercial rise of late Victorian entertainment as an industry and the second is the new social construct of childhood during the same period. What follows bring these two seemingly unrelated historical aspects together to show that by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the burgeoning theatrical industry was strongly placed to trade on society's obsession with the newly, culturally constructed identity of the child. Theatrical entrepreneurs commissioned child-themed and child-centered productions that would appeal to its long sought after mass, family audience, and reap large returns at the box office. This implied a change in the theatrical labor market. The existing child labor force was largely made up of children from theatrical families. The drive to promote childhood as the industry's newest item for consumption outstripped its existing pool of child labor. This forced the widespread recruitment of theatrically inexperienced child workers to meet the demand for (watching) children upon the stage. As a group, these children were differentiated by age, gender, and class; however, once recruited, they all had in common something that set them apart from nontheatrical children. Employment gave each performer worker two distinct and separate personas: the onstage child and the backstage child laborer. Both these personas were inhabited by a series of fluctuating identities.

Chapter 1 determines the place of theatrical child labor in the new business structures and economy created by mass provision of entertainment on the commercial stage. Child employees provided theatrical employers with much more than their labor; they comprised the industry's raw material and its saleable finished commodity. Their value to the industry is explored through examination of the time and money employers invested in their child workforce. With this in mind, an account is taken of the training regimes, apprenticeships, contracts, and wage rates offered to child employees.

Additionally, a willingness among employers to circumvent child protection laws so as to secure their workforce comes under scrutiny. Theatrical recruitment of children was on the rise at a time when child-protective legislation was progressively shifting the status of the child from worker to that of scholar. Theatre work provided an increasingly rare opportunity for children to earn from a very young age. Chapter 2 explores the worth of theatrical children to their parents and guardians who identified them

as a family resource. This recognition was not simply derived from the child's ability to contribute to the family budget but also stemmed from the kudos surrounding the performing child, which attached itself to the family's status and its standing in the community. The cross-class nature of the workforce and the destination of the child's wage coupled with the child's popularity with the audience is used to measure the child's contribution to its family. This chapter also considers the cost to the child as he or she attempted to satisfy the financially- and socially-driven ambitions of its family. Conclusions are drawn from parental attitudes to theatrical child labor and investigation into the work hours, backstage working conditions, and the impact of these on the health, safety, and moral welfare of theatrical child laborers.

The theatrical children spent the majority of their working life as a backstage laborer but for a short period in the working day, their identity shifted. It was the presence of an audience, which transformed the child's identity from backstage worker to that of stage-child. Chapter 3 appraises the complex relationship between the stage-child and its audience. This is achieved through close study of the appeal of children to British Victorian audiences and the emotional responses children evoked in those who paid to watch them perform. Equal consideration is given to the benefits children gleaned from their audience. Popularity, appreciative applause, and adulation empowered children and gave performers a sense of pride, self-worth, and status. This was countered by the notion of the child as public property and the unwanted attention that this could bring. Audiences identified with the theatrical characters the children portrayed, yet knew little of the children who represented them, or the realities of life for those children outside the parameters of the stage. Although performers sold an elusive product, through individual interpretation an audience purchased a tangible commodity that stayed with them long after they left the theatre. It was in the industry's interest to keep the child's public persona alive in the minds of its audience, and so children were promoted and publicized in a way that created an aura of celebrity around them. This was a double-edged sword. Audience appetite for the stage-child not only perpetuated the continued employment of theatrical child labor but unwittingly generated its exploitation. Rising demand furthered the industry's ability to exploit the profitable popularity of children, which intensified the working schedule for child laborers. In a climate fixated with child welfare this did not go unnoticed. Although a minority contingent, some voiced concern over the effects of theatrical work on children.

Chapter 4 pinpoints the prominent figures who identified the theatrical child as a cause to champion. This chapter challenges the historiographical consensus that conflates evangelical philanthropist, Ellen Barlee's work with theatrical children and the anti-theatrical child campaign of the National Vigilance Association (NVA), headed by Millicent Fawcett. Although Barlee and Fawcett shared concern for late nineteenth-century theatrical children, closer examination reveals a disparity in the origins of concern, wholly differing aims of how best to help child performers, and widely divergent strategies to achieve their respective goals. Both approaches are considered in detail and the ways in which these influenced the theatrical child's experiences of childhood are also addressed. The NVA's campaign sparked public discussion and debate in both the Houses of Commons and Lords, and this forms the basis of chapter 5.

Throughout the years of NVA theatrical agitation, the London Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (LSPCC) conducted a separate, concurrent campaign on child welfare and 1888 witnessed the tabling of a bill to protect children from cruel treatment.<sup>24</sup> The limited success of the NVA campaign prompted members to attach their revised demands to the Bill for the Better Prevention of Cruelty to Children. They sought to attach a clause to this proposed legislation to regulate the employment of theatrical child labor. This final chapter discusses the criticisms leveled at the industry's use of child labor and the strategies theatrical employers adopted to defend their employment of children and fight regulation of their child workforce.

Each of the previous chapters identifies a wide range of people who had vested interests in the theatrical child. Chapter 5 shows how individual interest translated into a collective network of support for the continued employment of theatrical children. Employers found allies on the shop floor from all those directly employed by the industry, including theatrical children themselves and their families. Wide-ranging support also came from within the many satellite industries spawned by the rise and expansion of commercially provided performance-based mass leisure. The industry boasted alliances in both the Houses of Lords and Commons, and consideration is given to the forging of these relationships. Additionally, the industry's manipulation of the influential contemporary press comes under scrutiny, as does the extent to which the theatre was held in high esteem by an enthusiastic, unquestioning, and supportive audience. Clearly, the industry was in a powerful position to oppose any regulation of its child workforce that might affect profits. The industry's strategies are discussed here through examination of debates around the passage of

the Bill, which included a clause for theatrical children and resulted in the 1889 Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act. As mentioned above, previous studies have concluded that this Act and its amendment in 1894 effectively protected theatrical children and greatly reduced their numbers. This chapter challenges that view on both counts.

## CONCLUSION

The book concludes that the construction of dual personas and multiple identities led to adult demands on and expectations of theatrical children, which prevented them from experiencing the “blueprint of childhood” designed and aspired to by legislation, philanthropy, and commercial enterprise. The contribution of theatrical children to the success of late Victorian theatrical industry equaled that of earlier factory children during the industrial revolution. The industry exploited the public persona of the stage-child to promote, publicize, and exploit the new understanding of childhood. In order for this to be achieved, the private persona of the theatrical child was compromised and its labor was exploited. What to other children was play became, most definitely, the work of the late Victorian theatrical child. This said, many child performers were not without agency and derived fulfillment from their work. As Anna Davin has argued in her scholarly study of poor children in Victorian Britain, “the working child was never simply a victim.”<sup>25</sup>

# 1. Raw Material, Labor, and the Finished Product: The Theatrical Child as Employee

The emergence of the late nineteenth-century entertainment industry was accompanied by the associated pressures of competitive and speculative production. Producers straddled the worlds of trade and leisure and were simultaneously answerable to their backers and to the paying public. Although there was much potential for profit, fortunes might just as easily be lost. Success was allied to securing the majority audience. Industry bosses needed to be astute and intuitive in determining, as Peter Bailey put it, “when to drop the ballet and promote gymnasts, to know how to compile a programme of the widest appeal.”<sup>1</sup> Throughout our period, supply of and demand for child entertainers show them to be one of the largest box-office draws of the time. When it came to theatre productions it was claimed that children comprised “some of their most attractive features” and should they be prevented from performing, it would “interfere with hundreds of operas and plays.”<sup>2</sup> The last 25 years of the nineteenth century saw the widespread employment and promotion of theatrical children. This fervent application of child labor points to its marked contribution to the commercial success of the entertainment industry.

## NUMBERS

Despite late nineteenth-century claims that “the employment of children in pantomime is of modern date” there is a long history of children upon the stage.<sup>3</sup> The performing child has been traced throughout centuries of theatrical history.<sup>4</sup> However, the key difference between their previous appeal and their use during the last quarter of the nineteenth century was

their increasing numbers and prominence on stage. Nina Auerbach concludes that, as late as the 1850s “stage children were prized because they were rare.”<sup>5</sup> From the early 1880s an unprecedented market for stage children continued to rise at a swift rate throughout the decade and beyond. The presence of stage children was prolific enough to instigate a call for action to end this form of child labor. “Stop the demand and the supply will soon cease. Stop the managers’ supply and their demand for children will die a natural death.”<sup>6</sup> However, many detractors recognized this as a futile call. “I dislike children on the stage... I do not see their purpose... Though I must confess that the audience is not of my opinion.”<sup>7</sup> It was this exact same majority opinion that ensured their continued manifestation in large numbers.

The prolific presence of theatrical child labor is evident from an abundance of advertisements, reviews, editorials, programs, and playbills, which allude to their performances. However, even with a richness of primary sources, any calculation of precise numbers remains problematic. The nature of the late Victorian entertainment industry hinders any attempt at a precise evaluation. This type of child labor was neither centralized nor uniform. At any one time an eclectic mix of performance genres was presented in a vast number of venues across the nation. The localized recruitment of children, children on tour, and those in traveling theatres and circuses make the numbers of children involved in these sectors particularly elusive. Estimation is further blighted by the attempts of employers to evade protective child legislation through the deliberate concealment of employee numbers. Simple ploys, such as the changing of a child’s stage-name, can prove problematic for the researcher attempting any headcount. For example, actress Florrie Robina recalls thinking that she had been replaced by another child when she saw her role billed as “The legend ‘Little Esmeralda,’ the girl with the woman’s voice.” She was relieved to be told that her employer had simply altered her identity and that the part was still hers.<sup>8</sup>

Contemporary investigators experienced their own difficulties when attempting to calculate the size of the nation’s theatrical child labor force. Millicent Fawcett claimed that numbers reached 1,000 in London in 1887, while in the same year, Cardinal Manning referred to 3,000.<sup>9</sup> A calculation of one performance genre alone came from contemporary commentator Laura Ormiston Chant who claimed that in 1887 “there were known to be 10,000 children employed in connection with pantomimes throughout the country.”<sup>10</sup> This estimate does not take into consideration the vast range of alternative performance genres that Ellen

Barlee had previously acknowledged. "Since Music halls, circuses and caravan booths have been licensed for dancing and gymnastic exhibitions the numbers of girls who have adopted this means of livelihood has raised from 4,000 to 12,000 or more."<sup>11</sup> By 1891, the mass employment of child entertainers had been established for more than two decades, yet numbers remained speculative. "No individual or body of individuals has any precise information about the hundreds of children engaged as ballet dancers, acrobats and models."<sup>12</sup> Indefinable numbers were not due to any paucity of child recruits. Given the public discourse around this group of child workers, Gertrude Tuckwell's reference to "hundreds of children" suggests a wholly inadequate understanding of how many children were involved. Child entertainers, though, were sufficient in number to warrant extensive public reaction and parliamentary debate. Given that commercially minded, profit-driven bosses employed a multitude of children, it is realistic to conclude that child labor brought a lucrative return within this hugely competitive industry. A number of different but related factors influenced the expansion of child employment in the theatre during the late nineteenth century.

#### DEMAND FOR STAGE CHILDREN: EXPANSION OF THE LABOR MARKET

At first, stage-child numbers increased within the generic expansion of the labor-intensive commercialization of mass entertainment. The changing nature of production that favored the spectacular further swelled recruitment to this emerging industry. Arthur Wilson encapsulates the new fashion for production that boasted "pageantry and splendour, magnificent scenery, gorgeous tableaux and above all imposing processions that often filled the Drury Lane theatre with armies of marching men, women, and children clad in dazzling finery."<sup>13</sup> Troupes of children made a central contribution to the huge casts which became fundamental to spectacular production.<sup>14</sup> While children did not necessarily occupy main roles, the division of labor indicates that they often made up a substantial percentage of the general cast. "The force may approximately be divided as follows: Band 30 persons; ballet and extras 150; carpenters 70; property and gasmen 60; dressers 50; children and supers 260."<sup>15</sup> Considering the claim that "managers find children so much cheaper than full grown extras" it seems safe to assume that child supers were an economic practicality in *crowd* scenes.<sup>16</sup>

The employment of large numbers of children was not exclusive to dramatic establishments. Ellen Barlee's investigation into the lives of performing children emphasized the reliance of the industry on a wide-ranging and flexible child labor force. "Different classes of entertainment are multitudinous and can last days, weeks or years."<sup>17</sup> Press reports support her claim and show a variety of ways that child labor contributed to entertainment. For instance, recruitment by circus companies increased as producers recognized the popularity of the spectacular genre in theatres and the profitability of children within this. Typical examples include 100 children employed to appear in twice daily performances of a grand battle scene that was staged in the circus ring. Another 50 children were hired to perform four times each day in a fairy equestrian spectacular.<sup>18</sup> The sizeable, national recruitment of child labor is confirmed by contemporary theatrical columns that advertised and reviewed the industry's vast output.

The Manchester production of *Blue Beard* at the Queen's Theatre mirrored a production at London's Drury Lane, and included an army composed entirely of children, which was led by a brass band made up of juveniles.<sup>19</sup> Pantomimes were the most popular and profitable productions of the year, and children were a huge part of their appeal. Journalists were clearly struck by the volume of children in any one production. Reviews invariably made specific reference to the presence of children and the numbers involved. Two Manchester productions boasted that "altogether about 40 young folks will be introduced to the cast of *The Forty Thieves* and *The Harwood Troupe* of children we understand are likely to appear in the pantomime at the Comedy Theatre."<sup>20</sup>

The demand for child entertainers in Pantomimes was far more than a localized novelty, it became a nationwide phenomenon. Productions, like those in Manchester were replicated in all the major cities:

"The Forty Thieves" is to be seen at the Surrey Theatre London; also at Glasgow (Royal); Sunderland (Avenue); Brighton (Royal); and Greenwich (Prince's). "Sinbad the Sailor" in addition to the Prince's Manchester; at Newcastle (Royal); Stratford near London; Cheltenham (Royal); and the Opera House Stockport. "Blue Beard" at the Queen's Manchester; also to be seen at Birmingham (Prince's); Bradford (Royal); Sheffield (Royal); Rochdale; and Opera House, Swansea. "Aladdin", now playing at the Comedy Manchester; also being performed at Leeds (Grand); Southampton (Royal); Derby (Grand); Woolwich (Royal); and at the new theatre, Oxford.<sup>21</sup>

This growth became apparent from the early 1880s. In 1885 it was claimed that "pantomime this season is produced at 109 theatres in 77 towns, a

slight increase in last year's figures, to which no fewer than 20 circuses and 11 music halls enter the field with grand Christmas Spectacles."<sup>22</sup>

Publicity highlighted the significance of theatrical children noting both their contribution and their numbers:

At the Royal Court, Chepstow Street it is intended to produce a Fairy Spectacular legend under the title of "Cinderella and the Little Glass slipper." As at the other places of amusement the entertainment of the young folks will be specially studied, and with this end in view upwards of 100 Manchester children will be engaged in the performance. There will be two performances daily.<sup>23</sup>

The labor-intensive expansion of the industry did swell the numbers of children employed on stage, but this alone was not solely accountable for their proliferation. A second, significant important factor also generated demand.

#### DEMAND FOR STAGE CHILDREN: CULTURAL CHANGE

As Michael Booth has observed, the entertainment industry increasingly reflected the daily concerns of its audiences. "Public taste interfused with art and was re-created in art forms for public consumption."<sup>24</sup> Within late Victorian society notions of childhood had evolved to become an important cultural focus. Of this Viviana Zelizer has argued<sup>25</sup>

Acting was condemned as illegitimate labor by those who defined it as a profane capitalization of the new "sacred" child. Yet, ironically, at a time when most other children lost their jobs, the economic value of child actors rose precisely because they symbolized on stage the new economically worthless, but emotionally priceless child.<sup>26</sup>

Theatrical employers were swift to recognize this and through their exploitation of the stage-child's emotional worth they were able to profit from its economic potential as child labor.

It was from the 1880s that the focus of the theatre audience began to shift toward childhood. Millicent Fawcett described this phenomenon as a "fashion, amongst audiences, for watching children upon the stage."<sup>27</sup> Of this expanding demand the theatrical missionary Ellen Barlee observed that "whenever a demand exists, political economy dictates that a supply will follow."<sup>28</sup> Unsurprisingly, the commercialized entertainment industry

responded accordingly. As the century entered its final two decades, children appeared on stage in greater numbers for longer periods and with added frequency.<sup>29</sup> The last quarter of the nineteenth century became a pinnacle for both the entertainment industry and the notion of childhood. Theatrical producers were well placed to benefit from an expansion of child-centered and child-themed productions.<sup>30</sup>

Creative writers were also progressively subjected to market demands. According to John Styan “producers of performance-based leisure extended their grip to play-writing.”<sup>31</sup> The new business demands of the industry dictated that playwrights joined the long line of those dependent upon the industry for their livelihoods. As one theatrical writer confirms, the nature of the industry dictated that authors wrote with revenue in mind “not pleasant work as it used to be but I fear profitable.”<sup>32</sup> The Victorian period was “a time when a variety of new forms of dramatic activity were tried and tested, and large new audiences were in the making... the second half of the nineteenth century was an era of prolific playwriting with around 20,000 new plays emerging between 1850 and 1899.”<sup>33</sup>

Contemporary comment supports that a good deal of this output focused on childhood and included children as cast members. “It is often said that this is the ‘Age of Children.’ If literature really reflects the feelings of the age there would seem to be much truth in the saying.”<sup>34</sup> Theatrical entrepreneurs contrived in all manner of ways to convert society’s obsession with children into monetary reward. Lobbyists against this use of child labor were clear about employers’ motives. “There is no question whatever that theatrical Managers wish to make the largest profit they can and they do so by employing children.”<sup>35</sup>

Expanding the productivity and profitability of children involved more, though, than simply engaging additional numbers. The industry’s new product was childhood, and as with any industry its latest line required clever promotion and marketing. Once producers fixed their sights and capital on promoting child-themed fare, young performers became increasingly featured in all areas of entertainment and were especially important at particular times. “Christmas, Easter and other holidays were theatre’s golden harvest times” and according to Barlee this was when there was “a large demand for children and young girls.”<sup>36</sup> In terms of profit, the pantomime was the most important in the industry’s financial calendar. These productions meant much more to producers than the immediate profit it brought. One early claim echoed repeated press reports throughout the last two decades of the century. “The reign of the pantomime is now firmly established... Upon its production vast sums are spent; upon its success

depends the theatrical balance sheet for the year. It means financial failure or financial fortune.<sup>37</sup> At the top of the scale a pantomime at London's Drury Lane could cost "in excess of £30,000 to stage."<sup>38</sup> It is useful to note that pantomime was one of the largest employers of children in greatest numbers. Their continued and featured presence in the industry's most fundamental production signifies the important contribution that child labor made to the industry as a whole. The seasonal nature of this work does suggest that employment was confined to a few weeks during the Christmas period. According to Millicent Fawcett this was misleading and in 1887 she supported her claim with an example that she suggested was the norm at that time. "The Drury Lane pantomime this year ran for four months; from the 26th of December to the 23rd of April. To this must be added, so far as the performers are concerned, at least another six weeks for rehearsals, and if the two are put together, it will be found that there is very little change left out of half-a-year."<sup>39</sup> This process challenged industry claims of its child employees being engaged at play.

Although pantomimes became considerably more spectacular over the period, there was also an element of caution evident within these offerings. With so much dependent on this seasonal investment, producers were obliged to reach the widest spectatorship. As such the family audience, which cut across age, class, and gender, was the primary consumer market it coveted. Children were fundamental to the industry's success in attracting and retaining its targeted audience. High demand for and supply of children was accompanied by an increase in the promotion of child performers through advertisements, featured articles, and press reviews. "The Covent Garden pantomime was certainly the best for the occasion, because it is essentially a children's pantomime, crowded with children's scenes, and enacted by very clever children."<sup>40</sup> There was no shortage of fervent publicity for this type of production. "A capital pantomime was acted at the Adelphi entirely by masters and misses in their teens; and only last year we were all astonished with the sly fun and boundless vivacity of some Italian children, who played 'La Fille de Madame Angot'"<sup>41</sup>

Pantomime advertisements regularly encouraged mothers to "take their young families to the theatre."<sup>42</sup> Evidence shows that these enticements were readily accepted. For instance, audience uptake at the Theatre Royal in Glasgow was representative of all the major cities in Britain. "In the first four weeks of its run 72,356 persons have already paid to witness the truly successful pantomime Aladdin."<sup>43</sup> The decision of employers to market children so solidly, both as performers and as audiences, during the most important periods of the theatrical year is testament to

the significant position they held within the industry's success. Reviews substantiate this. "There is nothing that children like better than to see children act. The Lilliputian scenes in the pantomime are always the most popular; and a manager has only to introduce a baby columbine, a youthful clown, and a boy pantaloen, to get the whole house in laughter."<sup>44</sup>

Late nineteenth-century audiences wanted to be presented with images of childhood that reinforced their own perceptions and satisfied their specific needs. As Russell Jackson observes, audiences demanded productions that made spectators "forget—for as much as possible of their time in the theatre—that they knew a world more 'real' than that placed before them on the stage."<sup>45</sup> Bearing this in mind the entertainment industry needed to profile its children to fit with the late Victorian model of childhood. For example, in reality some child employees were, as one manager termed it, "street urchins."<sup>46</sup> Such children might be employed to represent poor street waifs, but the salability factor required stage children to be visually pleasing. In effect, employers could take an authentic street waif have them washed and dressed in theatrically designed street waif costume and makeup.<sup>47</sup> Thus, an appealing stage-child could evoke the notion of the unacceptable face of childhood without confronting an audience with stark realities. Of course, the authentic street child would be rehearsed before being allowed on stage to represent a theatrical street waif. The comments of one observer suggest that through this shrewd presentation of children the industry achieved its desired effect:

We have come across real infants now and then in the course of visits to married friends . . . but the stage child is very different. It is clean and tidy. You can touch it anywhere and nothing comes off . . . even its boot-laces are done up. The stage child is affectionate to its parents and its nurse and is respectful in its demeanor toward those whom Providence has placed in authority over it; and so far it is certainly much to be preferred to the real article . . . The stage child is much superior to the live infant in every way . . . Everybody loves the stage child. They catch it up in their bosoms every other minute and weep over it. They take it in turns to do this.<sup>48</sup>

## ALL-CHILD PRODUCTIONS

The full extent of the theatrical child's role in the industry's success becomes apparent in the theatre's comprehensive investment in and exploitation of the child's allure. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s a new theatrical genre grew up around performing children. The industry

adopted fresh strategies that took the marketing of children to a higher level. Astute managers fashioned new style productions consisting of all-child casts.<sup>49</sup> This form of commercial development indicates that the industry employed children primarily as profit generators. In challenging efforts by campaigners who sought to remove children from the theatrical labor market employers placed emphasis on their artistic contribution:

Be it noted that not only pantomime and spectacle, but serious and even legitimate drama is threatened. Prince Arthur and the Duke of York may be acted by children in their teens, but a ten year old Maximillius would seem rather overgrown; and fairy plays would be out of the question . . . Children, in short, play so large a part in life that to banish them from the stage would be like forbidding a master painter the use of some indispensable pigment.<sup>50</sup>

Arguably, the exclusion of children in certain productions *would* infringe on artistic content. However, this argument falls short with regard to all-child versions of adult productions where artistic necessity was not a viable justification for their extensive use. Apart from the profit they could generate, there appears to be no other incentive for the commercial provision of all-child casts. It was their commercial potential that made children indispensable to the industry.

During the 1880s a wide assembly of all-child casts in numerous productions became progressively apparent. Publicity reveals that representations of this genre were commonplace. The *Court Theatre*, for example, promised “an afternoon show daily for young folks, when ‘Goody Two Shoes’ is performed by a company of children.”<sup>51</sup> This drama was a modest production when compared to the large all-child companies that were formed to tour the country. One of the most widely publicized of these ventures was an operatic company with advertisements and reviews appearing in the local press wherever the company performed. A stint in Manchester elicited a typical, positive response:

Mr D’Oyly Carte’s Children’s “Pinafore” Company, who occupy the Prince’s this week, have been here before, and most people know the character and merits of the entertainment . . . In regard to grace of movement, precision of action, and correct elocution, some of the older members of the profession might learn something from these juveniles.<sup>52</sup>

When evaluating the impact of theatrical child labor against the success of the industry, it is important to bear in mind that all-child productions were serious capitalist ventures.<sup>53</sup>

Clearly, entertainment entrepreneurs believed theatrical child employees to be a worthwhile and reliable asset. This is apparent from the extent to which producers were willing to invest the extra capital, time, and energy needed to address the specific requirements of all-child casts. This was not simply a case of replacing adult performers with children. For instance, Clement Scott testified that such productions required much preparation in tailoring to the skills and weaknesses specific to young performers:

As may readily be imagined, it was no child's play to transpose the key of every song to fit each individual child's voice; the choruses necessitated entire rearrangement, especially of the string parts, and in the unaccompanied numbers orchestral accompaniment had to be substituted for the support of male voices.<sup>54</sup>

All child productions were labor-intensive, professional affairs with much attention given to perfecting a performance. One journalist observed that this was the case with preparations for a production of *The Pirates of Penzance*. "Their ages, I should mention, varied between ten and thirteen. With but few eliminations or fresh recruitments, the company of Mr. Carte's original choice, fifty-four in number, underwent daily rehearsal for a little over two months."<sup>55</sup> Astute investment in all child productions evidently paid dividends for the industry. Producers saw fit to expand the marketing of their new merchandise through extensive touring. These companies regularly packed the theatres and typically played to "large enthusiastic aristocratic audiences, who filled the house."<sup>56</sup> Child productions were exceptionally beneficial to the industry. The novelty of all-child casts sustained regular return visits to all the major towns and cities.<sup>57</sup> These did not necessarily replace the adult versions but often played alongside them. For instance, one all-child production of *HMS Pinafore* played in the afternoons while the evening performance was given over to the adult version. The juvenile performances outran the adult production by one month.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, although in 1885 Gilbert and Sullivan retained four successful adult touring companies, they also recruited a fifth company that consisted solely of children.<sup>59</sup> Contemporary comment confirms that far from encroaching upon existing profitable ventures, all-child productions created additional revenue for the industry. Audiences were likely to make a visit to the children's adaptation after seeing the adult version.<sup>60</sup> The public appeared willingly to accept this additional cost. "It is worth all the money on the part of lovers of music to hear this boy sing Sullivan's music."<sup>61</sup>

It is also clear that some all-child casts could extend the profitability factor of popular adult productions. This was the case with the children's *Pinafore*. "As the adult version is now getting a little stale, this diamond edition will give it a longer lease of life."<sup>62</sup> This proved to be a lucrative move. The children's *Pinafore* was able to draw audience across the nation to an already extensively delivered production that had played 508 times at the Opera Comique alone, without calculating performances in other theatres in London and the provinces.<sup>63</sup> This is a testament to the huge capacity of children to generate profit for their employers and entertainment for their audiences.

Child entertainers held universal appeal, but their entertainments were particularly popular among younger viewers. Contemporary comment on audience reaction often referred to the enthusiasm for children watching their peers on stage. "All were enjoying it and the applause, in the treble of young palms was hearty and pleasant to hear."<sup>64</sup> This, along with the advent of matinee performances, provided the industry with further opportunities to expand upon the lucrative all-child genre.<sup>65</sup> Scott remarked on the enthusiasm of child audiences for juvenile productions:

If anyone asked me how best I could delight a private box full of children of all ages and sizes, I should decidedly say by expending a little judicious capital at the Opera Comique, where some exceedingly clever youngsters act "H.M.S. Pinafore" in admirable style and without a tinge of juvenile precocity.<sup>66</sup>

Seats at a children's matinee could bring in revenue of between two and five shillings each per performance. Child performances encouraged a new spectatorship, namely, the all-child audience that not only captured supplementary revenue but also inspired a future generation of theatregoers.<sup>67</sup> Despite the glamour associated with the production of entertainment, as significant in relation to the Victorian audience as it is today, it was a manufacturing process much like most other commercial industries. As children advanced to become key components in the oiling of the wheels of the industry, employers could not afford to ignore the growing revenue that child performers were contributing to company profits. Recognition of their future potential resulted in a need to reevaluate the children as raw material.

## RECRUITMENT

In the early stages of child recruitment, selection of the rank and file was achieved by a stratagem adopted by most industries requiring a casual

labor force. "At the time appointed the neighborhood of the stage door is besieged by a great multitude from which the stage manager has the troublesome task of making his selection."<sup>68</sup> There was though a crucial element specific to the hiring of casual child labor as entertainers that was not applicable to other industries. Indeed, the aesthetic appeal of child supers was prized over artistic prowess. Testimony reveals that a healthy yet unattractive child could work in most modes of child employment but not upon the stage. "She can go and make shirts, or cut out trousers, or run a sewing machine, but she cannot figure in a pair of pink tights."<sup>69</sup> Managers selected their child employees before establishing if they had any performing talent, "they tumble up to it [the stage door] by their dozens and as they come in [he] selects 3 or 4 score of them who are blessed with pretty faces."<sup>70</sup> The selection process was swift. "Some few are eligible at a glance—smart—well formed—tidy looking girls; some few are equally certain not to be cast-dragged disreputable and impossible."<sup>71</sup> Both the speed and criteria of selection implies that the primary role of these children was decorative rather than artistic.<sup>72</sup> One dancer at the Drury Lane Theatre tells that appearance affected the rates of pay offered and their position in the line up on stage:

Front Row generally known as front line or front eight are paid from 40/- + half for matinees = £3 per week. [The second row] The pretty girls here [Fanny was one of them] get the same as the first row. This is by favour. The girls of medium looks get £1 + 10/- for matinees... Harris [the theatre's owner/manager] is the judge of prettiness.<sup>73</sup>

Appearance remained a significant factor of recruitment, throughout the period, but as the role of children became more central to the business of entertainment then additional considerations increasingly came into play.

The theatrical child comprised the industry's raw material, its labor, and its finished product; childhood rapidly became one of the industry's most lucrative merchandises. However, as one theatrical entrepreneur noted, there was "no difficulty in obtaining any quantity of necessary raw material."<sup>74</sup> Over time new composite productions demanded a more sophisticated workforce. Increasingly, recruitment of attractive but unskilled labor proved inadequate. "It is never pleasant to employ cheap material. The difficulty of making these 'supers' understand what they have to do is extreme."<sup>75</sup> *Quality* raw material was fast becoming the key to keeping production costs to a minimum and profits at a premium. Experience could address some of the problems confronting producers. Some rank and file children were annual applicants for Christmas productions, and these

seasoned recruits introduced siblings and friends to the work.<sup>76</sup> This familiarity naturally created a readily accessible pool of casual but experienced labor. This evolutionary acquisition saved time and money on rehearsals and produced a superior end product. However, as both the popularity and value of child performers steadily increased and children became more central to production, the established ad hoc system of recruitment became unviable. It became necessary for employers to invest in transforming their child workers into a skilled labor force.

## TRAINING

During the 1880s there was a clear shift in recruitment toward a preference for accomplished performers. "Having selected our children they are turned over to the care of the ballet master or mistress... [she] transforms the miscellaneous company of raw recruits into a systematic and well-disciplined corps."<sup>77</sup> The press echoed this thinking and regularly voiced its approval over the positive effect that training had on the standard of performance. "The ability and perfection of training exhibited by this class of stage youngster was well exemplified."<sup>78</sup> Training, thus, became a factor in the promotion of children. "The introduction of trained children proved such an attractive item in the pantomime of 'Mother Goose' last Christmas at the Theatre Royal, Captain Bainbridge has resolved to pursue a similar course with his forthcoming annual."<sup>79</sup> Similarly, the *Famous Midget Minstrels* were billed as "phenomenally talented" children who had been "trained to perfection."<sup>80</sup>

The fact that employers were willing to create a skilled workforce from casual child labor demonstrates the Victorian child's worth to the industry. According to employers, a skilled and experienced labor force was also a potential resource with possible long-term benefits for continued success of both the theatre and the individual performers. "A child in the pantomime getting the advantage of early training may someday become great in the profession."<sup>81</sup> Millicent Fawcett challenged such claims. She argued that "those of them who can obtain engagements in theatre after they are grown up are counted by tens."<sup>82</sup>

The many and varied ways that children were presented to the public made the process of training theatrical children a complex procedure. Those children used in stage processions or as decoration for the stage were usually required only for single productions; although, if the production was a pantomime, the employment term would cover several months.<sup>83</sup> The attention given to children in lesser roles is testament that every level

of theatrical child labor was seen worthy of speculation by theatrical entrepreneurs. The industry's investment in its raw material was paralleled by increased exertive labor on the child. Training became a key and serious consideration when linked to recruitment:

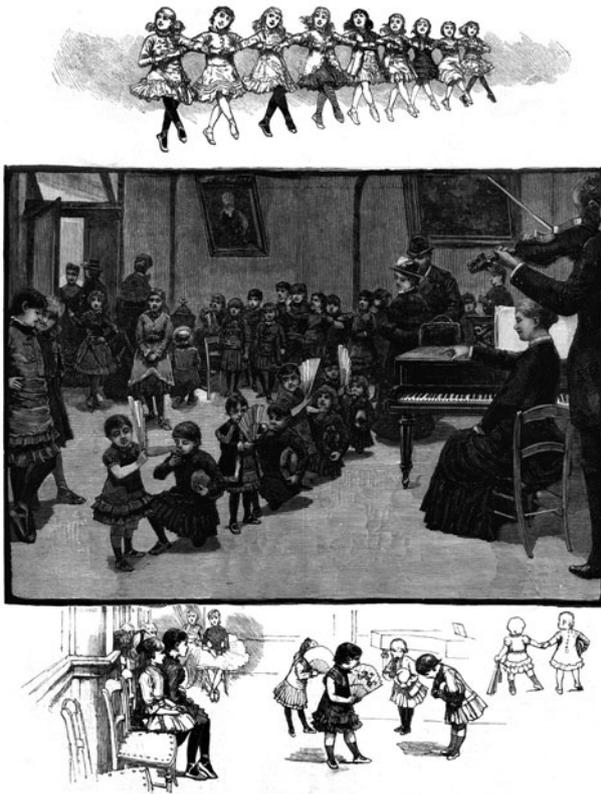
Dressed up in their ballet skirts they would spend a whole morning under Katti Lanner's instruction, and perhaps even then only one particular movement had been perfected. Talk about discipline!<sup>84</sup>

The industry claimed that child performers were not set to work but were simply at play when on stage. However, this flies in the face of their boasting about the professionalizing of their child recruits and what this entailed. "Before they make their public appearance there is a long and tiresome training to go through."<sup>85</sup> Evidence suggests that this was potentially taxing for the children concerned. "Day after day the drilling goes on for several hours."<sup>86</sup> Frederick Dolman described a strategy adopted by employers in the rehearsal of infant employees "several of whom were too young to read and had to be taught the words of their singing by word of mouth."<sup>87</sup> For employers, this was a worthwhile investment because the youngest children often equated with the largest profits.<sup>88</sup> The promotion of one, three-year-old child is a case in point. Barlee recalled that she was "billed as the tiniest dancer in London, she attracted the crowds and always played to a full house."<sup>89</sup>

The rehearsing of incidental children in routines requested by the stage manager also entailed expenditure on the services of professional choreographers and singing coaches although not, as shown below, on child's wages.<sup>90</sup>

There were degrees of training which equated with the child's significance to a production. Although much time was given over to the rehearsing of the rank and file, according to one ballet mistress these children were "not trained, in the strictest sense of the word at all."<sup>91</sup> To appreciate the industry's investment in child performers it is important to note the contemporary understanding of training. Trained children were defined as those who were receiving some form of professional regular instruction in the performing arts outside of the theatre. A key consequence of the industry's expanding demand for quality raw material was that a whole subsidiary business sector grew up around the training of children in all aspects of the performing arts.<sup>92</sup> The industry's demand for skilled child labor encouraged enrolment to schools. The need for a skilled labor force saw children stepping up their game in the face of competition. There was

a rush to gain the necessary skills that would bring in the work. As Barlee noted, a child's enrolment "secured them their heart's desire, viz an entry of their names on the agents' books for training."<sup>93</sup> Increasingly, training superseded other marketable attributes with access to training a recognized essential. This was good news for those in the business of training because by the late 1880s this was the main route to engagement. Children and their parents understood the realities of the theatrical labor market that was willing to employ and pay more for trained and experienced children. This guaranteed a constant influx of children into training establishments, from which proprietors could sustain a living.



**Figure 1.1** Etches at a Training School for Dancing, *The London Illustrated News*, January 3, 1884.

The extent of demand for child entertainers is indicated in its ability to generate and maintain subsidiary businesses in this way. The willingness to supply trained children bears witness to the important position occupied by young performers within the industry.

During the last quarter of the century the industry adopted a lucrative business strategy through the popularizing of the previous elite art of ballet:

There is no brighter gem in the crown of the music hall than the ballet, which is rescued from the neglect of the opera house and sedulously nurtured... great opera, ballets and dancing bade fair to become a lost art till the expanding variety theatre offered it an asylum.<sup>94</sup>

Reviews show that children played a significant role in the commercial popularization of ballet. Their widespread inclusion within its choreography became a vast generator of business not only for theatres but also for those who supplied various theatrical outlets with trained labor. Dance training became a particularly buoyant branch of the industry's subsidiary trades. "In one training school close to a popular theatre, a visitor saw from 80 to 100 girls, who ranged in lines of proficiency, not age, were being taught their steps."<sup>95</sup> The need for and success of such businesses further confirms that theatrical children were important to these new initiatives. Moreover, the practices adopted by academies plainly show that theatrical children were an exceptionally valuable commodity.<sup>96</sup> As businesspersons, first and foremost, academy proprietors were fiercely protective of their assets and investments. Fawcett highlighted an industry-spread practice:

Proprietors of theatrical dancing academies induce parents to bind their baby children of four or five years old to a seven or nine years apprenticeship... they are entirely under control of the man or woman to whom they are apprenticed, and they are ready to be hired out for public performances in any part of London or the country.<sup>97</sup>

A parental signature contracted a child to the elected academy and in the words of one contemporary commentator, "they are bound to appear in any theatre the manager of the school may see fit to send them to, without any special payment being made besides the usual remuneration."<sup>98</sup> The obligatory nature of these documents led Fawcett to conclude that parents, in effect, signed their parental rights over to the academy.<sup>99</sup> Dance historian Ivor Guest suggests that this procedure was advantageous to Katti Lanner. "The indenture of apprenticeship which bound

them to her, if it erred on either side in generosity, certainly did not select the apprentice for its aberration.”<sup>100</sup> Documents were legally binding, as some parents found to their cost when summoned to court for breach of contract.<sup>101</sup> The need and willingness to take such rigorous safeguarding measures do point to the theatrical child as a key generator of profit for their individual enterprises.

In order to protect their investments, theatrical employers and proprietors of training establishments took steps to evade child protection laws concerning education and employment. This was not difficult, as existing laws did not fully take into account the unique conditions of theatrical child labor. Theatrical methods of production differed from those of general industry. Therefore, those who drafted the protective legislation earlier in the century could not have predicted the specific needs of theatrical children and the modes of operation. Fawcett cited the 1870 Education Act to illustrate this point:

This act forbids the employment of children under ten, and places educational conditions on their employment between ten and fourteen; but with an exception which allows, or at all events is construed by its administrators to allow scores of children under ten, some as young as four or five, to be employed day after day and night after night in theatres and pantomimes.<sup>102</sup>

As shown below Fawcett and her supporters identified the ways in which inadequate laws and deliberate collusion left child performers in a vulnerable position.

## EDUCATION

Expectations of child recruits were such that they could not help but interfere with the general education of those apprenticed into the industry. The toll was confirmed by one ballet master. “Three or four hours dancing practice and tuition a day in addition to the stage work for five or six years and that will make a good average dancer but perfection and promotion takes many years.”<sup>103</sup> Time demands made by the industry on its young workforce were matched by the time demands made on them by the 1880 Education Act. The introduction of compulsory schooling simultaneously created a dilemma for employers and a leverage tool for campaigners who were against theatrical child labor. Activists claimed that child performers were often unavailable for school and when in attendance they were too tired to apply themselves to their lessons.<sup>104</sup>

Children were too profitable for the industry to allow protective legislation to reduce earning potential. General evasive action included the affiliation of some training schools to private fee-paying schools to take jurisdiction away from school boards and avoid prosecution over non-attendance. During busy periods some theatre managers set aside space backstage to be used as a schoolroom and engaged a teacher for their young employees. Campaigners condemned such measures as sham tactics undertaken by the industry to gain a tighter control over its child workforce.<sup>105</sup> Regardless of motivation, the fact remains that the employers thought it necessary and worthwhile to develop strategies to address the issue of compulsory schooling. This in turn is evidence of the value placed on child entertainers by their employers.

The gendered nature of theatrical child labor did though make evasion of educational legislation simpler. Whenever possible, girls were employed over boys with girls often hired to play boys on stage.<sup>106</sup> There were two main reasons for this. First, female children were seen as being more malleable than boys. It was thought that they were easier to discipline and better behaved. As one observer put it, girls were “more amenable to rules and regulations.”<sup>107</sup> Boys showed more agency. “No discipline seems to keep a pantomime boy in order.”<sup>108</sup> Secondly, education was widely viewed as less important for girls. Fewer questions were asked about the absence of girls when the industry required them to play truant. It was generally assumed and accepted that female offspring would be needed at home to help with domestic duties.<sup>109</sup> This gave the industry much leeway for rehearsals, matinees, late night, and touring performances.

A measure of how precious the labor of children was to employers can be seen more clearly by their readiness to contest any *new* laws designed to bring theatrical children under the protective umbrella of legislation.<sup>110</sup> One report reflects the general thinking with regard to proposed legislations to bring theatre children into child-protective law. “Moreover it will doubtless be found when the act comes into force there will be many ways of evading it. For it is a proud boast of many English lawyers that they can drive a coach and four through any act of Parliament ever passed.”<sup>111</sup> Evasive and deliberate actions on the part of employers to secure an expansive, readily available workforce serves to emphasize the substantial contribution of a child workforce to the success of the entertainment industry.

Such strategies ensured employers a constant, easily accessible supply of child labor. The contracting of pupils meant that academy proprietors became their sole theatrical agents. Their role was aptly summed up by

Barlee, "Agents make life easier for managers, but to agents, children simply represent so much marketable ability to be turned into profit for their employers' account."<sup>112</sup> From the 1880s the economic climate was seen as increasingly favorable for trainer/agents. The increasing preference for trained children meant a switch from direct recruitment at the stage door to the use of professional suppliers of theatrical child labor. In return for a percentage of their earnings, trained children received their engagements and pay via the agent they were contracted to.<sup>113</sup>

## TRAINERS AND AGENTS

The dual role of trainer and agent was beneficial to the financial success of this particular branch of theatrical business. Better paid and more frequent work went to skilled children. As a result, trainers secured a continual supply of *free* raw material. The key inputs to capitalist industry are raw material and labor; in the case of child entertainers these were one and the same thing. This meant that there was only one cost and any value added was in training. The race for performance skills and stardom intensified enthusiastic enrolment at training establishments. Moreover, through the payment of fees, children and their parents actually subsidized the premium rates training brought for those tutors who were also agents.<sup>114</sup> The industry's call for skilled children ensured trainers a demand for their product while managers provided them with nationwide retail outlets for their finished creation.

Those children contracted to the National Training School of Dancing; the most famous of the establishments, gave the theatrical entrepreneur and choreographer, Katti Lanner, access to her own pool of skilled labor from which she produced numerous children's ballets.<sup>115</sup> At just one of the many theatres she supplied she produced no less than "thirty six ballets, some being revised in 'second editions,' and the first thirty-four of them, produced between 1887 and 1905, being consecutive works."<sup>116</sup> Lanner's copious productivity extended to national and international venues and, as a matter of course, included child pupils from her dancing academy. This practice continued throughout her long career.<sup>117</sup>

Although Lanner's was one of the larger and most publicized subsidiary theatrical concerns, plenty of others sustained a living from the employment of theatrical children. The careers of many academy proprietors and tutors can be traced through articles, reviews, and advertisements in the columns of the trade journals throughout the last 25 years



Figure 1.2 Days with Celebrities Madame Katti Lanner, *Moonshine*, December 29, 1888, 307.

of the nineteenth century. Miss Emily McLaughlin's school of elocution is a case in point. She began her trade in 1884 and was based in the drawing room of her father's home. Ten years later Miss McLaughlin's business had successfully expanded to her proprietorship of a thriving Theatrical School.<sup>118</sup>

Theatrical training and the supply of children was not an exclusively female business domain. Male instructors were equally able to obtain a living from training young theatricals. An investigation by Charles Mitchell into the lives of theatrical children revealed one “male professional whose whole life had been connected to the stage and whose chief occupation consisted in the drilling and training of children.”<sup>119</sup> Two of the most celebrated figures within the training field were also male. Mr. Nolan and Mr. Fitzgerald became, as one commentator put it, “about the largest ‘purveyors of children’ in London.”<sup>120</sup> Popular, academies did not hold the monopoly on the training of children. There were also many independent tutors who made their living from teaching theatrical skills. Independents might teach in their own homes or, if required, the homes of their pupils.<sup>121</sup>

Profiting from the supply of skilled children was not restricted to professional teachers nor was it limited to a specific class. Demand for child performers encouraged individual enterprise in child trade.<sup>122</sup> Venue managers cast the net wide for children to meet the specific needs of their audience. The polarization of suppliers is clearly illustrated through the demand for children to represent animals in processions, fairy spectacles, and pantomimes. Training was required for these roles. Children had to be taught how to perform while clad in restrictive animal skins. Katti Lanner took training of this sort, but she did not hold the monopoly.<sup>123</sup> A theatrical missionary described the situation of a woman of a similar age but of different class who taught the same skills and supplied theatres with children:

The imp woman was of middle age and had three miserable little children dependent upon her, as her husband had absconded. These with several others which she borrowed as business required, provided her with a good living, as she supplied several of the “low” theatres with imp children used in pantomimes and plays to represent huge frogs, cats and other animals, also as angels, goblins and demons. Employers from the theatres used to come to fit skins and to instruct the children in their duties. . . . These were of the most ludicrous kind, and her boy of six did the monkey so well that for two Christmas seasons he earned £1 a week. . . . Upon entering the room he [the missionary] saw that the sobs proceeded from a blue fiend, which was wagging its forked tail and shaking its bat wings upon the table to command, the woman standing over the creature with a cane.<sup>124</sup>

According to Barlee, this business is but one of many such examples.<sup>125</sup> The so-called “imp woman” made her living from supplying children to theatres at the lower end of the market. This is something that indicates

the breadth of opportunity for independent suppliers who were able to benefit from the vast demand for young, skilled entertainers.

At the higher end of the job market children featured as part of the main cast.<sup>126</sup> The industry's successful acquisition of the family audience was accompanied by a growing acceptance of acting as a legitimate profession. From this came an increase in recruitment of middle-class children. One trade journal typically commented on this new influx of children. "It is surprising the number of well, not to say highly bred and educated children one meets with nowadays on the pantomime stage little ladies and gentlemen, who speak, act, and behave in quite a superior manner."<sup>127</sup> Leading children were recruited to the profession in a number of ways. Some were the offspring of established theatrical families. Owing to the increasing demand for young performers, parents were well positioned to boost the family business by promoting their own children at an early age.

The demand for children was particularly beneficial to theatrical families. The mother of Phyllis Bedells, for instance, had originally become an actress to help her husband to finance the education of their son and daughter. However, the increasing profitability of child performers persuaded an enterprising Mrs. Bedells to give up her own career and to promote that of her daughter. Bedells' mother had publicity leaflets printed to promote her daughter's career. These were sent to various theatre managers with a request for an audition. Testimony from Phyllis highlights the possibilities of social mobility from setting a daughter on the stage:

We were able to say goodbye to the boarding-house . . . and take a three-roomed flat over a shop . . . which we furnished on the hire purchase system. By the time I was fourteen I had a home of my own, Out of my salary we managed to save a little for a rainy day as well as pay for my dancing classes and instalments on the furniture.<sup>128</sup>

Experienced members of theatrical families were able to coach their young relatives and secure work for them through their own business and social contacts.<sup>129</sup> Apprenticeships for these children were served within the family firm. Children became skilled without the need for costly or binding contracts and agents' fees. Their mentors were also in a position to engineer the most lucrative engagements. Actor Conway Thornton, for example, penned his own sketches to include his daughter, Ella, who regularly played alongside her father assuring the family of a double income for each performance.<sup>130</sup> It was also a common and profitable feature to have siblings play sisters and brothers in dramatic productions or to tailor an act

to include several siblings. Considering the relatively generous wage rates of theatrical children, the employment of several children from one family could bring in a sizeable sum.<sup>131</sup>

It was possible for the children of nontheatrical, middle- and upper middle-class families, who showed some aptitude for entertaining, to enter the profession at a high level. These children had an advantage over ambitious jobbing performers from the lower classes who aimed to move up through the ranks. Children from better-off backgrounds did not necessarily have any formal training, but they were able to exploit social connections to individuals who were influential in the theatrical world. One trade journal provides a typical example of a successful principal child actress whose sole training had comprised “some dozen lessons in elocution when ten years old.”<sup>132</sup> However, regardless of family connections, only talented children among the well connected could be considered for employment at this level. Profits came before nepotism.

Employers ensured that leading child performers made a marked entry into the business through deliberate publicity campaigns and unashamed promotion. The theatrical press carried articles about them, interviews with them, and photographs of them. Additionally, all their performances were heavily advertised and reviewed.<sup>133</sup> Mass publicity guaranteed to keep children in the public eye and to generate interest among their audience. The industry’s promotion of its precious commodity provided impressive curricula vitae and an air of celebrity for featured children. Marcus Tindal observed that “the most child-like of children will to her visitors show, with no little pride, her book of press-cuttings.”<sup>134</sup> The careers of four siblings, which began in a juvenile spectacular in 1889, were so eventful that four years later one journal claimed it had no space to give its readers a full account of their performances.<sup>135</sup>

Clearly principal child performers were a profitable commodity, “If they manage to take the public taste managers’ fall over each other to employ them.”<sup>136</sup> Children were regularly marketed as infant prodigies.<sup>137</sup> Theatrical producers fully exploited the crowd-pleasing potential of leading children by investing in the creation of roles that would exhibit their particular talents:

As many who saw “One Summer’s Day” at the Comedy Theatre must have suspected, the part of the Urchin was specially designed for Master Bottomley by Mr. Esmond. It may be supposed too, that Sutton Vane had him in his mind when he introduced the queer little *gamin* Goliah into his play “The Crystal Globe” at the Prince’s last winter.<sup>138</sup>

Principal children's agents were often family members. Those with family connections were frequently offered roles rather than having to seek them out. This was particularly true of the most popular children. The high and varied demand for theatrical children meant that trading in their supply was far reaching. Large professional establishments to individual suppliers shared one common feature: the recognition of child performers as a cost-effective and profitable commodity.

## WAGES

The capital employers were willing to invest in theatrical children verifies their value and contribution to the business. For instance, a regular priority on the agenda of the Association of London Music Hall Managers was to determine ways to reduce performers' salaries and boost shareholder dividends.<sup>139</sup> Compared to the rates of adult performers, children's pay was by no means the largest drain on the wages bill.<sup>140</sup> However, as children were often employed as a troupe their collective pay comprised a sizable financial outlay. Given that curtailing wage costs was a priority for the industry, it is noteworthy that theatrical employers were willing to pay child performers above the general rate paid for child labor.

As Tracy Davis has demonstrated, principal performers excepted, "the only time theatrical wages were likely to exceed industrial rates was in childhood."<sup>141</sup> Earnings of child performers could vary and several factors determined the rate that they could expect to receive.<sup>142</sup> The location, size, and type of venue had to be considered as did the size and importance of the role. Touring rates also differed from those paid when the child worked locally and resided at home.<sup>143</sup> The performer's individual popularity also influenced levels of pay. Taken as a whole, however, wage rates for theatrical children were comparatively generous when measured against alternative waged opportunities for children.

Davis has clearly shown that girls in nontheatrical work rarely earned more than one shilling a week.<sup>144</sup> In 1897, a survey on waged child labor by Edith Hogg provided a framework, within which, to compare the general earning capacity of theatrical children. In one of many examples, Hogg reveals that a girl of seven years would receive a few pennies per week in return for many hours of daily cleaning.<sup>145</sup> By comparison, some 15 years before the publication of Hogg's report, untrained theatrical children were earning a starting wage of three shillings and sixpence a week rising to between six and eight shillings a week.<sup>146</sup> One year before the publication

of Hogg's report the pay rates of child dancers had risen to between one and two shillings for each performance with older experienced girls receiving a pay of between four and eight pounds each month.<sup>147</sup>

Rates for theatrical boys were also attractive compared to alternative employment. Hogg suggests a barber's boy would have to work for more than 30 hours a week for two shillings and sixpence.<sup>148</sup> Even the lowest provincial rate for boy dancers appears generous when set against Hogg's examples. Like their sisters, untrained boy dancers earned between three shillings and sixpence for a night's performance in the provinces, and double this pay in London.<sup>149</sup> Boys in nondancing roles were also well paid. A 13-year-old boy commanded 12 shillings every week for his first part. He appeared in a scuffle scene that required him on stage for few minutes two or three times each night.<sup>150</sup> Large principal theatres, on average, paid between one and three pounds a week for prime roles, although this rate could be reduced to between 10 and 20 shillings in minor theatres. The father of a boy actor confirmed wages in one all-child touring company to be 15 shillings a week in the chorus with principals receiving between two, four, and five pounds, exclusive of board, lodgings, and travel expenses.<sup>151</sup>

Theatrical employers were not only prepared to pay over the going rate for child labor, but they were also willing to increase these rates for experienced children.<sup>152</sup> As one ballet master put it, young dancers received, "nine to fifteen shillings a week . . . from being auxiliaries and get in the regular army at fifteen shillings to thirty shillings but still in the ranks."<sup>153</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that employers offered such inducements to children implies that they were prized by the industry for their universal and money-making appeal. Estimates of the actual wages earned by individual children have, though, to be qualified. Wages were paid only for performance, and the long hours of rehearsal received no remuneration. One young ballet girl voiced concern over this "we have to practice for four to six weeks, for which in London we get not a single penny piece."<sup>154</sup> If a child was contracted to an agent, it was the latter who secured the rate for the job and the children received only a fraction of this. "Front row ballet girls sometimes get £5 a week but the work is uncertain and does not last. (In this Mdm. Katti Lanner has been drawing £5 and only giving the girl £2.10). The girl found out after some time and then negotiated for herself. Now draws the whole of the £5."<sup>155</sup> In a breach of contract case, the court testimony of Katti Lanner's secretary showed not only the commission to be made from hiring dancers to theatres, but the high rates theatrical employers were willing to pay and the high rates of increase which saw this young girl's earning potential double during the course of two years.

“In 1896 Miss Parry was getting 9s, and the plaintiff [Katti Lanner] 12s. In 1897 the former was receiving 9s to 12s and the plaintiff 18s a week. In 1898 Miss Parry received 12s to 18s a week and the plaintiff received from 18s to 30s a week.”<sup>156</sup> Evidently, at 33 percent Lanner’s potential earnings from commission on child labor was substantial. Especially, when we consider that at any one time she could have troupes of children appearing all over the country and abroad. Well before demand for child performers had reached its height, Lanner had for some time been a purveyor of troupes that comprised of 30 or 40 dancing children. When Lanner took over the “National Training School of Dancing” in 1876 it had been seeking investment, however under Lanner’s management it had by 1879 become self-supporting.<sup>157</sup> Generous wage rates allied to binding contracts were conducive to securing a compliant and reliable child workforce, but it is not suggested here that all child entertainers were the hapless victims that detractors proclaimed this group of child workers to be.

A clear indication of the child’s key role in the industry’s economy can be found in the bargaining power held by those performers with whom an audience was particularly taken. Georgina Middleton was one case in point. “This little girl has of late deserted the theatre proper for music hall sketches in which she stars in her own company.”<sup>158</sup> Claims from one ballet master reveal the degree of agency enjoyed by some young entertainers who “manage to hit the public taste, managers’ fall over each other to engage them and they can ask almost what they like.”<sup>159</sup> Barlee was also mindful of this. “Incredulous sums were earned if billed as prodigy or celebrated dancer.”<sup>160</sup> Barlee also demonstrates that some children were self-aware of their agency. The example of one eight year old reflects the extent of this:

I’ve been to see two managers but as they only offered me £1 a week I declined. I’m not going to dance for them at that rate, I can tell you. There’s nothing in the business I can’t do so I am off to Mr. – – for he will give me 30 shillings, I know, like a shot.<sup>161</sup>

This level of confidence is also indicative of the contribution that children made to the industry’s success. The potential bargaining power of children can be seen from the actions of a group of boys employed on stage to represent waves in a sea scene. They had only to bob up and down under a canvas, but this contribution formed an integral part of an ambitious ship wreck scene. The children recognized their worth to their employer and threatened to strike if not given a wage increase:

In spite of the thunder and lightning the cloth forming the sea refused to respond to the stage-manager’s repeated adjurations until the boys engaged

underneath to produce the angry waves were promised additional pay, when at once as shilling instead of sixpenny waves, the storm acquired its desired dramatic effect.<sup>162</sup>

Evidence offered above allows us to discount any notion that a shortage of theatrical child labor forced employers to agree to generous wage rates. There existed, during the last quarter of the century, a large pool of theatrical child labor whose numbers invariably exceeded demand.<sup>163</sup> "If you remove 5,000 children from stage association today, and a theatrical agent put out his notices tomorrow then you would have five thousand more."<sup>164</sup> This was a buoyant industry with an oversubscribed workforce during a period of general economic depression. The wage rates offered by theatrical employers clearly show that child labor comprised a fundamental element in the financial success of the entertainment industry.

The last quarter of the nineteenth century was for the entertainment industry, a period of commercial excellence. The preoccupation of the late Victorian society with children encouraged the industry's marketing of childhood as its new product. The labor of child entertainers permitted prevailing notions of childhood to be transformed into something tangible that employers could present as entertainment and sell to an enthusiastic audience. The initial rise in child numbers formed part of a general increase in labor which followed on from commercial expansion. However, employers recognized that their child workers held a contributory potential of their own; the child's ability to appeal to a universal audience was a valuable asset to its employers. It is difficult to identify a similar attraction within the industry with an appeal that cut across the class, culture, age, and gender of a mass audience.

The industry's approach to the marketing of childhood provides evidence that the labor of theatrical children played an important part in its success. That the industry found it necessary to increase their recruitment of children, and over time invested in the transformation of recruits into a skilled labor force indicates that children were a worthwhile venture. The fact that their training sustained a vast subsidiary industry underscores their profit value. The extent to which they became an essential element in the success of the industry can be seen from their impressive rise in status among employers and audiences alike. From simply making up the numbers in the industry's labor force, children became a focal selling point. Their success and contribution is evident given that through the extensive application of their labors the industry established a new genre of child-centered and child-themed productions. The profitability of children to the industry is clear from the comparatively high wage rates they were able

to secure. A second and perhaps more important indication of the child's worth was the extent to which the industry was prepared to safeguard its labor supply. Children were such a profitable asset that in order to ensure they had a flexible and readily available child workforce, employers were, as shown below, prepared to go to great lengths to appease, evade, or fight opposition to their continued use.

Child labor was a crucial element in the success of the late-nineteenth century theatrical industry. However, the employment of theatrical child labor was at its height at a time when childhood was widely accepted as less a time for earning than a period of learning. The following chapter explores the ways in which, as key promoters of theatrical childhood, the industry encroached upon the real childhood experiences of its child workers.

## 2. Laboring Fairies: The Theatrical Child as a Family Resource and a Resourceful Child ∞

The conceptualization of childhood in the second half of the nineteenth century coincided with government and philanthropic research into the welfare needs of children. Within this period, a spate of legislations on education was implemented during the third quarter of the century. New laws around schooling were key in helping to define the Victorian perception of children and their place in society.<sup>1</sup> The domain of the child was increasingly seen as within the peer environment of school as opposed to the adult realm of the workplace. Reallocation into this new child milieu was accompanied by a shift in status for the child within the family. As children, increasingly, came under the protective umbrella of legislation their earning opportunities became progressively restricted.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, James Walvin has argued that compulsory education “effectively ended the nation’s commitment to widespread child labor.”<sup>3</sup> This may well have been the case in older established industries, but it was not so with regard to children employed as entertainers. The commercial provision of performance-based leisure for the masses was in its relative infancy during the formative period of protective child law. The specific modes of operation and the future needs of child labor within the entertainment industry had not been envisaged. As a consequence, gaps in legislation created loopholes that theatrical bosses were able to exploit to recruit child labor.

In Michael Lavallette’s excellent study that draws on census data of child workers, he observed that “after 1881 children between the ages of 5 and 9 are not recorded because their numbers are so small... Young children had almost ceased working by the 1880s.”<sup>4</sup> There is, however, much

evidence to indicate that during the 1880s and well beyond 1900 the entertainment industry engaged in sustained, recruitment across the nation of child workers. The majority of those so employed not only came within the age band quoted above but also included children younger than five years.<sup>5</sup> The children under indenture to Katti Lanner were aged “from five years old upwards.”<sup>6</sup> In 1879, The National Training School of Dancing is reported to have had 147 pupils on its books. Their ages ranged between 3 and 12 years.<sup>7</sup> Essentially, at the precise time when child laws were believed to be addressing the issue of child labor, the recruitment of child performers not only gained momentum but also became more rigorous and extensive as the decade progressed.<sup>8</sup> It is understandable that the vast majority of child labor studies have previously overlooked this growing force of young employees. The historic invisibility of children, who worked in the theatre as “other” than labor, was something that employers had encouraged from the outset. The reasons why theatrical child labor was so under-recorded are many and complex, although in contrast to previous claims, numerical insignificance was unlikely to have been one of them.

The aim of this chapter is to reveal a hidden workforce of child entertainers who were employed between 1875 and 1914. Examination of the labor conditions of young theatricals and the underlying rationale that informed their vast recruitment gives voice to those children whose stories are waiting to be told. Children had a presence in all performance genres and performed in many venues throughout Britain at just that time when, on a national scale, access to child employment in other trades was increasingly circumscribed. The entertainment industry was not explicitly incorporated into the legislation concerned with child welfare and employers became adept at circumventing those laws that might have limited its free use of child labor. The entertainment industry employed some of the youngest children to have been set to work since the operation of the domestic system. Children as young as three- or four years of age who were superfluous to any other industrial workforce were prized employees in the world of entertainment. It was not unusual for children to become seasoned performers before they reached eight years of age. One example was of a girl who began her career at the age of four when she appeared in a production of “‘Gulliver’s Travels’ in Lilliputian Land. At that age, her wages were four shillings a week, and now as an 8 years old, she could earn nearly double by taking ‘short parts’ in various plays.”<sup>9</sup> Good wage rates were indicative of the profitability of the youngest performers. Paying audiences were particularly taken by their dainty appearance and the engaging ways in which they were presented on stage. One backstage account describes

“the babies have come down under the care of the dressers... Suddenly there is a call for them; the audience applauds boisterously.”<sup>10</sup>

One of the youngest child performers, cited by Barlee “commenced her stage career at the age of eighteen months... Her friends had heard that a baby was wanted at the theatre and had responded by offering this little one’s services. Her first earnings were 3 shillings a week and the engagement lasted three months.”<sup>11</sup> A substitute of any kind for a child workforce was not a viable option for theatrical bosses. Childhood was the industry’s new commodity and only children could convincingly sell this to the public.<sup>12</sup> The commercial potential of children deemed them indispensable to the industry. As such, rather than discontinuing this profitable line, there was a willingness among those with a vested interest in theatrical children, to collude in the evasion of any laws that might regulate the employment of stage children.

### STAGE CHILDREN AND THE FAMILY ECONOMY

When compulsory schooling was introduced it not only curtailed the time duration when children were available for work but also restricted the types of work they were able to undertake. With fewer opportunities to contribute financially, children were becoming economic dependents within the family unit. The entertainment industry offered families a financial lifeline.<sup>13</sup> This rare work opportunity, coupled with relatively generous wage rates, attracted a large pool of child labor to the stage doors. Many children who sought employment in crowd scenes, processions, and spectacles were inhabitants of poorer communities characterized by under- and unemployment.<sup>14</sup> As one journalist observed of would-be recruits “fortunate they deem themselves if they are ranked among the numbers of the elect of fairyland.”<sup>15</sup> At a basic level, the work could bring immediate personal advantage to the children themselves. As Tracy Davis put it, “statistics show that children’s wages were of real benefit to them and that the rate of pay was exceptionally attractive, especially for girls.”<sup>16</sup> This translates in contemporary comment to “what the little things earn at the theatre helps to put warmth and food into their little bodies.”<sup>17</sup> Benefits though could far outreach the child’s personal needs and often extended to family survival. This was particularly applicable for families where the adult breadwinner was engaged in seasonal or casual work.<sup>18</sup> At such times a child performer’s wage could often become the main source

of income.<sup>19</sup> Barlee offers examples of the great resilience shown by many child performers from orphaned families who provided for younger brothers and sisters in order to keep the family together.<sup>20</sup> In such instances, the availability and importance of a stage child's income cannot be overemphasized. The same can be said of the weight of responsibility placed upon the young shoulders of children whose earnings, for instance, "paid the rent."<sup>21</sup> Perhaps one of the most illustrative ironies comes from the recollections of one child from an impoverished background:

I made my first appearance in a child's part in a little sketch called, "Father Come Home," at Leeds. I got 6 shillings a week and I remember the first use I made of my wealth was to buy a shawl for my mother.<sup>22</sup>

There was a minority of individuals who remained unconvinced of the need of any child to earn. They directed criticism at those parents who were accused of substituting the labors of their children for their own. It was also claimed that parents spent their children's earnings on alcohol rather than on family necessities.<sup>23</sup> A lobby of supporters countered this claim. "Some say the extra money goes for extra gin, and that may happen in some cases; but, at any rate, the child's earnings usually purchase a share of food as well as of drink; for the worst blackguard in the world dares not send a starveling to meet the stage-manager."<sup>24</sup> The findings of one investigation into theatrical child labor highlighted the importance placed by parents on the earnings of their offspring and that this was driven by the needs of their children. At the time it was claimed that "the 3 shillings and 6d per week earned by the children is the main consideration. 'Jenie wanted clothes.' 'Father has been terribly ill and out of work.' 'The times are terribly hard and little coming in,' such formed the staple excuses."<sup>25</sup> Such claims and counterclaims continued for decades during debates around the child performer as an employee.

The theatrical child's role as family benefactor was not necessarily restricted to the very poor or to times of economic crisis.<sup>26</sup> As contemporary commentator, Gertrude Tuckwell, noted additional earnings could raise an already adequate standard of living. "A good many of the stage children are, however, drawn from the artisan class; they are the children of fairly prosperous people . . . and the children's wage makes a considerable difference to their comfort."<sup>27</sup> As the industry expanded, it targeted the respectable family audience and its increased output of child-themed and child-centered productions was a useful tool with which to secure this profitable patronage. The growing respectability and professionalization

of commercial entertainment was instrumental in raising ambitions within children from the better-off classes for them to take to the stage. This shift in attitude opened up the theatrical doors to many children whose parents would previously have prohibited them from performing in public.

The desire to ease family hardship, as demonstrated by the less privileged of theatrical children, can also be found among those from the more advantaged backgrounds. Although circumstances differed between the classes, relatively speaking the sentiment behind them remained constant. The action of a young girl, who later became a child star, is testament to this:

When Patti was almost seven years old she well remembers seeing her father in great distress on the point of parting with a diamond ornament he possessed, so that his children might not want for bread. Like lightening an idea flashed through her childish brain. "Papa" she exclaimed, "You just give a concert and I will sing!" . . . Her success as everybody knows was immediate.<sup>28</sup>

Although this report claims that the girl's father laughed at his daughter's initial suggestion, it did not prevent him from acting upon it. Even allowing for the gloss that time might have put on this reminiscence; the girl described did come from an affluent background, and it is significant that it is her economic contribution that is highlighted as the key motivator for her entry into the industry. Evidence shows that once acting was professionalized the theatre could provide a financial lifeline for those who came from "good stock" but found themselves experiencing lean times. Similarly, this new profession offered middle-class girls an escape route from their destined life in the private sphere:

How many younger sons of well-born but not too well-to-do parents have hailed the present social position of the actor with delight? How many educated girls, finding themselves, through force of circumstances, suddenly compelled to face the world on their own account have turned with a sigh of relief from the prospect of the stereotyped position of "companion" or "governess" to the vista that an honourable stage connection with the Stage holds for them . . . These young aspirants rush to the stage as to the promised land.<sup>29</sup>

Regardless of whether theatrical children were set to work to pay the rent or to save the family's silver, it is clear that parents recognized the theatrical child worker's potential as a family resource that could have a profound effect on their collective standard of living.

Not all children felt compelled to work and many were not required to turn over their earnings for the greater good of the family. The celebrated actress Irene Vanbrugh is testament to this. Of her theatrical child years she recalled:

I got many a thrill by walking the length of Old Brompton Road and saving a penny which I would squander on a divine concoction of chocolate and coconut to be bought at a certain shop...I half wished at the bottom of my heart that my labors were a necessity to the upkeep of the home. In such circumstances I feel I might have denied myself the luxury of that chocolate in order to feed my starving family instead of having all I earned to keep for my very own.<sup>30</sup>

Although Vanbrugh offers a rather romanticized view of poverty, her testimony does demonstrate that the backstage community of child entertainers contributed to a collective awareness of the variety of imperatives that influenced the destiny of money earned. For some, a sizeable theatrical wage funded a self-indulgent childhood:

I used to travel to the theatre by bus and I was twelve years old when I fell in love with the bus conductor...I spent my entire theatre earnings on bus fares from the depot to Baker Street. This went on for at least one month until I encountered Pierre Dumont, the son of my French Governess...and the money I had hitherto spend on bus fares, I now spent drenching myself with California Poppy and Phulnana perfume until my father claimed that our flat smelt of an oriental bazaar.<sup>31</sup>

The luxuries her earnings afforded her are indicative of the purchasing capacity of the theatrical child's wage. The money squandered by some would have been a significant contribution to the subsistence needs of less-fortunate families from which the majority of "jobbing performers" originated. Such diversity in the destination of wages reveals that certain children desperately *needed* the work, while others just desperately *wanted* it. This raises the questions of why, in the absence of economic necessity, would a child want to work and what was it about theatrical employment that might secure parental approval?

The key to answering this question lays in the fact that the entertainment industry straddled, in equal measure, the worlds of work and leisure. This meant that young entertainers simultaneously inhabited two distinct personas that were separated only by the stage curtain. Back stage, the child's role was one of a worker, but once in front of the footlights the child

adopted the mantle of performer. It was this public aspect of performance and leisure that set the work apart from all other forms of child employment. Public perception of theatrical work was grounded in the leisure perspective. It was this misconception of theatrical work that proved a lure to many would-be child performers. This is perhaps understandable, given that many children's initial introduction to the theatre was as a member of an audience where "caught up with the magic of the performance they were no longer content with their passive role and desired to participate; to become part of the electrifying proceedings."<sup>32</sup> The growing respectability and professionalization of performing sanctioned the entry of upper middle-class children into the theatrical world of work.

### STAGE CHILDREN: CELEBRITY

The 1880s saw the advent of celebrity within the industry. Glamour became associated with all things theatrical, and this helped to entice children to seek out fame on the boards. The desire for fame was intense among children and should not be underestimated. The period witnessed the development of a "mania" to be on the stage.<sup>33</sup> This yearning to tread the boards cut across the classes. The effect was all the greater for those young performers who hailed from less-fortunate backgrounds. The stage offered an escape from the physical and emotional harshness of life. Of this, one theatre journalist mused:

Must it not be a temporary Heaven on earth to the children whose homes we have alluded to above to be associated with the joyousness, the brightness, and the beauty of display of the scenes with which they appear?... Who will say that harm can come of this association with all that is so likely to impress upon the young minds of the back-slums the fact that there is a brighter and a happier sphere outside the wretchedness of their daily lives?<sup>34</sup>

Some of those who noted children's craving for audience adulation regarded it as a self-centered and negative pursuit. "One noticeable feature in these children's character is their insatiable thirst for admiration, their organs of approbateness becoming largely developed. This doubtless arises from the public notice which is tendered to them."<sup>35</sup> Clearly, many children did revel in the limelight of the stage and its potential for celebrity status. One young actress recalled that her fans "wanted to carry me shoulder high around the hall and I had to have a special police escort to escort me to my lodgings."<sup>36</sup> No other form of employment could offer its child workers an

equivalent accolade and recollections leave no doubt as to how desperately children prized audience adoration. "When you mount unconsciously the glittering stairway you never give a thought that it may fade away and leave you without a foothold. Leave you more desolate because the departed glamour was not only attributed to you."<sup>37</sup> Unsurprisingly, this reliance on an audience for personal affirmation encouraged young performers to seek out the limelight. "At the close of the pantomime season I was of course relegated to the obscurity of private life, but all my thoughts were centered on the glories of the stage, and whenever there was a benefit or charity concert or anything of that sort going in the neighborhood where we lived I used to volunteer my services."<sup>38</sup> Profit from the labors of theatrical children may have been at the forefront of the minds of employers and parents alike, but recognition of emotional worth through appreciative applause was paramount among the collegiate of theatrical children. It was this that largely formed the basis of their conformity to the painstaking demands of backstage work. Mass appreciation also translated into a sense of job satisfaction that was largely unparalleled in alternative forms of child employment.

Becoming a paid entertainer afforded children a certain status within the family circle and the wider community. "When once in receipt of wages, these little ones are henceforth transformed from street waifs into young ladies."<sup>39</sup> One report highlights how family members could bask in the success of their stage-child's persona:

Of course it must not be understood that we intend to convey that all the children employed in pantomimes are of this lowest strata of human life, but a very good many of them are, and it not only improves them, but it also has a sort of reflected effect upon their parents, who take a certain amount of pride in them, on account of them being engaged in the work of the theatre, which would otherwise be entirely absent.<sup>40</sup>

This was a prevailing and much publicized sentiment:

Pantomime children are a proud and happy lot. For not only do they glory in the inexpressible pleasure of wearing fine clothes and being "somebody" but at home they are the heroes of the hour. Sally and Billy are not of much account, except at mealtimes in the poor little home; but fresh from impersonating the gallant soldier or the popular sailor, or the Kate Greenaway schoolgirl, they are people of consequence in the family circle, and also, public characters whose claim to respect and admiration is readily allowed by envious neighbours.<sup>41</sup>

Actor-manager Henry Irving also acknowledged that child performers were envied by children of their class “who were not so fortunate as to get an engagement on the stage.”<sup>42</sup>

Child entertainers were quick to take advantage of the supposed enviable station that stage work afforded them and the self-esteem that this fostered.



**Figure 2.1** *Pantomime Child (to admiring friend).* “Yus, and There’s ANOTHER HADVANTAGE IN BEIN’ A HACTRESS. YOU GET YER FORTYGRAPHS TOOK FOR NOFFINK!” *Punch*, Wednesday, November 27, 1901, 379.

This is plainly demonstrated by Marion Keates' when recalling her first public appearance "Yes and wasn't I proud? Rather! I held my head quite three inches higher; did up my back hair and insisted on being addressed as Miss Keates."<sup>43</sup> Child actress Florrie Robina echoed these sentiments. "Although quite a child, I was very proud of my reputation and jealous of my fame."<sup>44</sup>

The public identities of young performers not only elevated their status and that of their families, but for those children who caught the public's imagination there was also the prospect of an adult career and social mobility. This was a prized vision that was well-publicized. "As everyone familiar with theatrical biography well knows, many a distinguished stage career has begun almost in infancy."<sup>45</sup> It is crucial though to put such claims into perspective. When compared to the vast number of children employed on stage only an insignificant percentage ever reached the height of their chosen profession.

Opportunities for a successful adult theatrical career were more readily open to children at the higher end of the market.<sup>46</sup> One Ballet mistress admitted that there were some exceptions to this rule "I frequently get quite a number of poor children, regular little street urchins some of them . . . Sometimes I discover a promising dancer, and then I endeavour to obtain parental consent to properly train her."<sup>47</sup>

The possibility alone of enduring success was enough of a lure to ensure employers a well subscribed and compliant child labor force. Ellen Barlee noted additional aspirations associated with this type of employment:

The girls frankly admit they consider that, in raising their social position, the chances afforded to them of making a good marriage; otherwise in their own homes, nothing but service is open to them. Every now and then, the marriage of some nobleman or man of wealth with a favorite actress fuels this utopian idea, although not one in ten thousand ever attains such promotion.<sup>48</sup>

Fame and wealth may well have eluded the majority of jobbing performers, but the industry could provide them with a living behind the scenes. Evidence suggests that many children hired during the labor-intensive 1880s did remain in the business.<sup>49</sup> An introduction to the industry, at a young age, was not without its advantages. Young performers gained knowledge and experience that opened up "various opportunities of becoming working men and women in the many departments of the theatre."<sup>50</sup>

## STAGE CHILDREN: PARENTAL ASPIRATION

By the mid-1880s the respectable family audience had been seduced by the entertainment industry. A switch in status for performance-based entertainment ensued and respect for dramatic art was enhanced. According to one contemporary, the vocation was by this time “acknowledged to be a high and important one, and the society of the intelligent and cultivated actor eagerly sought after.”<sup>51</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, a shift in attitude was plainly apparent:

For the first time in the history of histrionics in this country, acting is regarded, not merely here and there, but more or less generally, as a profession to be adopted as one adopts Medicine, Law, or the Church, the Army, the Navy, or the Civil Service.<sup>52</sup>

A consequence of professionalization was that it widened horizons for middle-class children whose performances had previously been restricted to amateur productions. The popularity of the theatre greatly influenced the lives and tastes of the public outside of its venues. The zeal for watching child performers in the private sphere equated with the fervor shown to child entertainers in the public arena. Typical opinion reflected this trend:

At-homes, receptions, bazaars and similar entertainments, are dull enough in the ordinary way, but of late it has been the custom to enliven them with the acting and musical sketches, in the performance of which our stage babies are making themselves favorites.<sup>53</sup>

Amateur productions made it permissible for middle-class children to practice and hone their skills in performing and audience manipulation. Moreover, such performances functioned as a possible springboard to a theatrical career for youngsters. The celebrated careers of sisters, Lulu and Valli Valli began in this way:

They first sang and danced at afternoon “at homes” under the auspices of their aunt, Mrs. Mary Watson, the musical composer and teacher, by whom their extraordinary talents were discovered and developed. [The younger of the two] was so small [aged four] that she used to sing and dance on top of a grand piano.<sup>54</sup>

By the late Victorian period, many young girls from the middle classes embraced the option of entering the public sphere of paid work in an area that had, previously, been closed to their mothers’ generation.<sup>55</sup> Progressive

thinking within fashionable society also sanctioned mothers' aspirations for their children. The promise of fame was beguiling across the class divide. For example, Marie Harris aged 13 and her 10-year-old sister Dorrie owed much of their success to their mother:

With the exception of some lessons in dancing from a well-known stage "coach", they have received all their training from their mother, an accomplished lady who has, herself, acted a good deal as an amateur, more particularly in India, where the stage as a recreation is so much favored in military society.<sup>56</sup>

The rise of the middle-class "stage mother" is evident at this time. Performing offspring had the potential to fill a void in their mothers' lives. This could take several forms. For instance, those women who were restricted by the angel in the house ideal and denied their own aspirations for a professional acting career, could "live out" their own theatrical fancies by assisting their children to achieve theirs.<sup>57</sup> The experience of Irene Vanbrugh illustrates how these forward-thinking women could also empower their daughters. "My mother was heart and soul in favor of grasping the opportunity which to her had fewer terrors and from her own desires she longed to give Violet the chance of a career which as a girl she would have so easily have sought for herself."<sup>58</sup> Violet entered the profession in 1884 and when, four years later, her sister wished to join her she recalled, "Violet with both hands outstretched, made the opening wide enough to get through herself and when my time came the door was still ajar and others had also followed in her wake."<sup>59</sup>

Growing acceptance of the stage enabled enthusiastic mothers to tailor their daughters' education "with a view to a theatrical career."<sup>60</sup> Within the middle-class domestic setting, artistic accomplishments had long since been recognized as prized female attributes<sup>61</sup> Crucially though, in terms of liberation into the public sphere of paid work, this progressive step was potentially life changing. Unsurprisingly, daughters and their mothers grasped this new prospect of autonomy and acted upon it. Testimony reveals a proactive approach. "With great joy, I began to have singing, piano and fencing lessons, dancing lessons with Madame Carmani, and acting lessons with the great Rosina Filippi... They were happy days for me."<sup>62</sup> Mothers were also instrumental in navigating the path that a daughter's career would take. Phyllis Bedells thought herself to be more fortunate than some of her contemporaries in terms of motherly direction:

Mother used to come with me to the theatre... she looked like a frightened mouse as she sat in the dressing-room for she was desperately anxious

not to become the typical “theatre-mother” but she was different from the majority of the dancers’ mothers.<sup>63</sup>

Regardless of what fueled parental aspirations, if these were not shared by their performing offspring, the consequences could weigh heavily on small shoulders. In terms of social and economic currency, a child entertainer was potentially vulnerable in the hands of less-scrupulous parents and guardians. Popular fiction of the time highlights contemporary concern about the dubious practices of some. Dorothy Lowndes provides one of the most provocative portrayals of a mother parading her reluctant, yet, resigned daughter around the circuit to perform for free:

One of the men near her was leaning forward but the little girl had drawn back quietly beside her mother again. “Won’t you speak to me, Bébé?” he said coaxingly. “Yes of course. Go and sit on his knee,” Mrs. Vescey assented carelessly drawing her forward. “Don’t be shy, Bébé” she added in a tone of slight ridicule. Bébé allowed herself to be lifted on to the young man’s knee, and submitted to being kissed and petted with an air of tired indifference... “You’re my sweet-heart aren’t you, golden hair?” he began in a half teasing manner, which he rather fancied. This was usually the style of his conversation to her. Bébé knew it well. She did not answer, for she was waiting her opportunity to slip down and run away. It did not seem likely to come, however; Lord Charles was holding her closely with his arm, stroking her loose curls with his other hand, and whispering nonsense to her, making love in a fashion to see how she would take it. She took it very patiently; it was a part of her life, this toleration of people because “mother” wished it. Bébé had as keen a sense of the unfitness of things as most children have, but she swallowed her objections, and only turned her head away rather wearily when his attentions became too pressing.<sup>64</sup>

The heady mix of ambition, money, social status, and celebrity placed all child performers at risk of untoward attention. Such prized trappings were unique to the entertainment industry, and this lent itself to those opportunists with predatory tendencies.<sup>65</sup> Whether the intentions and goals of stage mothers were altruistic or otherwise, there was always a fine line to be negotiated between respectability and exploitation.

Unlike any other form of child labor, stage-children were well positioned to experience a sense of command and agency. Young entertainers had the ability to control the emotions of an audience, and this was a powerful draw. As Angela John put it, “the actress is subject to the direct gaze yet divided from the audience on stage. An actress creates a world of make-believe whilst the admirer watches. Her very inaccessibility can add to the fantasy and be conveniently seen as temporary, the presumption being that

she is available once the performance is over.”<sup>66</sup> However, if the audience–performer relationship was allowed to continue outside the confines of the auditorium, control could shift and the child become the vulnerable party. Reports show that there was a downside to the rewarding adulation that attracted children to the stage. “Marion has plenty of admirers and she seldom leaves the ‘dark stage door’ for her brougham without encountering one or more specimens of that particularly objectionable product of our *fin de siècle* civilisation—the masher.”<sup>67</sup> In a society gripped by the cult of the child, young performers had their fair share of admirers who were not content with worshipping their idols from afar. One investigation into the lives of child performers concluded that:

There are temptations connected with such employment that are peculiarly hazardous in the case of young girls. I dare say it may be maintained the youth and tender age of the children place them beyond the dangers of such evil communications. But let it be remembered that although there are a number of very young children there are a good many girls from twelve to fourteen which is just the most impressionable age.<sup>68</sup>

“Jobbing” performers from poorer backgrounds were less likely to be chaperoned, but it is important to bear in mind that this was not necessarily by choice. It was rarely economically viable for mothers of this class of children to accompany their offspring to and from a venue. Such children were aware of their increased vulnerability.<sup>69</sup> “Sometimes when worn out with barely enough money for necessities, I do feel that when gold is offered me, it is almost too much for my powers of resistance.”<sup>70</sup> Of course, it is not argued here that all attention was necessarily inappropriate. Nevertheless, a tendency for young performers to be viewed as public property did make them vulnerable child employees. Child entertainers were not a centralized workforce, and consequently there was no universal experience of this type of work and the benefits and challenges it generated.

Employers’ claims that stage work provided a sanctuary for its child workers points toward their acceptance that dangers lay outside the stage door. The degree of refuge offered in relation to this was not as comprehensive as employers purported it to be. For instance, with the exception of matinee days, once rehearsals were over young supers were not required during the daytime, except on the occasion of matinee performances. Children’s voices reveal that employers regularly left them to their own devices. “We rest from three till four, only they don’t allow us to stay in the theatre, and we have to keep in the streets if we haven’t

anywhere else to go... From six till seven we do as we like"<sup>71</sup> Children were again left exposed once their theatrical working day came to a close. Eyewitness statements supported assertions that "hundreds of pantomime children go home in the dark and alone and they get into bad company and the morality of the theatre is not proof against the immorality of the streets."<sup>72</sup>

Many stage children showed a natural craving for attention and their rigorous theatrical training equipped them to procure this. Capturing audience devotion and evoking response on stage was a goal shared by both employer and employee, but a penchant among the young for the limelight off-stage was a cause for concern. For the young, unwitting performer this need for adoration could be misinterpreted.<sup>73</sup> Perhaps, no girl is subject to so many temptations as the ballet girl. Behind the scenes she is constantly being addressed by men of fortune and talent and "to a girl comparatively ignorant, the temptations are great, and the bright promises held out are many."<sup>74</sup> The blurring of lines between the characters represented on stage, and the performers who portrayed these were potentially problematic for the inexperienced child. The worth of the child as a family resource was matched by its importance as a source of profit for the industry and its value to the audience as a source of pleasure. Satisfying all those needs could not help but compromise a young entertainer's experience of childhood because despite all the rhetoric, those deriving some sort of return from the children's work were unwilling to acknowledge their vulnerability. This happened in the most public of ways, but those benefiting from the children's labor chose to interpret it otherwise, or were beguiled into seeing only the chimera of illusion. Given the public nature of performance, child performers would appear to have been a very visible workforce. However, the largest demands on their time and energy were made during the time they spent at work behind the curtain, well away from the public gaze.

## BACKSTAGE WORKERS

The world behind the stage was a relatively unknown entity to the audience. This mystique was carefully crafted by the industry and enhanced notions of the unattainable celebrity that fostered a subculture of fandom among the paying public. Clandestineness also allowed a veil to be drawn over backstage realities. These often formed the antithesis of the glamour and excitement that paying patrons widely associated with being entertained.

Similarly, new, young recruits to the business were not necessarily prepared for their unspectacular working environment. Of this Vanbrugh recalled “that unplumbed fairyland of ‘behind the scenes,’ so different from what is imagined, may be disappointing when first encountered.”<sup>75</sup> One individual who unexpectedly, accompanied a friend backstage endorsed, “I could not help wondering as I crossed the dirty stage and saw the squalor and filth which is hidden up behind the scenes, how delicate and dainty dresses and brilliant costumes ever retain an hour’s freshness with such surroundings.”<sup>76</sup>

Back stage comprised the theatrical equivalent of the factory floor and formed the antithesis of the swish and gilded front of the house.

Although the finished product (the performance) was publicly associated with leisure and pleasure, the following account illustrates the contrasting perspective of its backstage manufacture:

Assembled with their hair in papers, looking like ghosts with bad colds, being kept up so late each night for the frost scene in the pantomime. Sneezing and low grumbling in all directions each person attending literally to the words of the call, everybody looking concerned. Groupings commence to a single violin, and the loud thumping of the ballet masters stick to keep time. Most of the sylphs and the fairies rehearsing in their street clogs and umbrellas.<sup>77</sup>

The capacious auditorium contrasted sharply with backstage space, which was at a premium.

Theatrical employers prioritized the industry’s public image over and above the health, safety, and welfare of their young workers. As one journalist put it:

Dressing rooms were not a top priority for theatrical employers often because of lack of space managers and architects seem to think a deep stage or what not is better and artistes could be herded together like animals. There is lack of space in London and poor facilities but accommodation in the provinces is scandalous.<sup>78</sup>

In short, back stage emulated factory-sized production, but within a workshop-sized environment. Although theatrical employees were engaged in the manufacture of a single end product, the stages of manufacture were both vast and diverse. Rehearsal periods, in particular, saw carpenters, painters, machinery, lighting equipment, orchestra, choreographers, and performers jostling for space.<sup>79</sup> One journalist claimed that the youngest children were shielded from dangers as “the babies, their little white

slippers clutched tightly to their hearts, and enthroned on the table to be out of harm's way."<sup>80</sup> Clara Morris recalls a less-romanticized account:

It was no unusual thing for the little one to get frightened behind the scenes, One Monday evening as I came to my place, I saw the new baby standing all forlorn, with apparently no one at all to look after her, not even one of the larger children. She was evidently on the very verge of frightened tears.<sup>81</sup>

Larger groups of older children, without supervision and perhaps not as intimidated by their surroundings, were no less at risk. This was particularly true of boy performers who were shown to be, "hidden everywhere except where they are wanted. Hidden in the flies, lurking in corners, in the way of scenery and workmen, playing with dangerous properties."<sup>82</sup>

Chaotic cramped and grim working conditions were exacerbated by design planning. Dressing rooms at some venues were situated in the flies and were reached by an iron, spiral staircase that had to be ascended by performers three or four times each night.<sup>83</sup> This was a continuing source of hardship that took its toll on young performers. One young apprentice reasoned that the constant climbing of the "92 steps from the stage to her dressing room at the *Empire Theatre* had rendered her too frail to dance." This did not dissuade her employer from taking her to court for failing to complete her contract.<sup>84</sup> Low-rise dressing rooms offered little respite as often these were "small, fireless and frequently damp rooms boarded off from some passage exposed to sharp currents of air."<sup>85</sup> As will become apparent, young performers were the least protected of any group of child laborers even though their backstage workplace was on a par with factory conditions before the children's Factory Acts came into force.<sup>86</sup>

Similar to factory production, the entertainment industry embraced advancing technologies. With the coming of mechanization, fantasy could appear real and reality could be faked convincingly. Automation fed the growing supply of and demand for spectacular productions during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Progressive production did not necessarily imply any advances in working conditions for performers:

The transformation scene of a pantomime, in which numbers of coryphées (or ballet girls) were strapped aloft in irons...exposed them to excessive heat and the noxious fumes of the special lighting that made the transformation scene...a wondrous thing of beauty... The poor pale girl is swung up to terrific heights, imprisoned in and upon wires, dazzled by rows of hot flaring gas

and choked by the smoke of colored fires. . . . John Doran visiting backstage during a Drury Lane pantomime, commented optimistically that there was no danger of them being roasted alive, provided they were released in time . . . seldom a night passes without one or two of them fainting.<sup>87</sup>

The fact that employers were willing to satisfy audience demand to see such feats, at the expense of the health and safety of their workers is evidence of how valuable young performers were as a commodity. This can also be seen with respect to parental attitudes to such issues. “The girls who are to fly in the new ballet won’t have the wires affixed to them unless they are raised to eighteen pence a night, their mothers won’t let them endanger their lives under that sum! Now Sir we should be in a great scrape at night if this were to happen.”<sup>88</sup>

Safety, or the lack of it, was only one consequence of backstage working conditions. Several factors, singly and combined, adversely affected the general health and well-being of the young performer.

## HEALTH

The working environment had a direct impact on the health of theatrical children and were manifest from mild ailments to fatalities. With each component of a production needing to be simultaneously completed to tight deadlines, back stage was both noisy and stressful.<sup>89</sup> One eyewitness observed that in such a charged environment even those symptoms of lesser severity could be distressing for a young child, “This season, one little bit of a girlie, tired with the incessant noise of a lengthened rehearsal, was found by the writer of this article away from her post and crying bitterly with a headache.”<sup>90</sup> Such instances are made all the more poignant by the “show must go on” work ethics attached to the theatrical industry, which dictated that its child employees were required to “learn to smile in the theatre, whatever we may feel in our hearts.”<sup>91</sup> The pressure on children to grin in the face of adversity was real. One account reads “the boy came down a tremendous thump with his head on the stage. The plucky little fellow however, came on again though looking very white and ill and met with a big reception he thoroughly deserved.”<sup>92</sup>

Illness was common among young performers. Characteristic claims confirmed that “there’s many a ballet girl of weak constitution who sows the seeds of consumption and kindred diseases in her system through the continual exposure and physical exertion of her life.”<sup>93</sup> Illness though did

not necessarily relieve performers of their duties. Barlee recalled one backstage conversation between two young dancers:

One of them who looked as if she were dying of consumption and coughed incessantly said to her companion, who remarked upon it; "Yes I go on so, pretty much of the time, and I have a mind somewhat to kill myself."<sup>94</sup>

Tuberculosis was perceived as a real threat to the health of theatre children whose work was regarded as making them particularly susceptible. "The reason why many of them die of consumption—and a good many of them do—is that they have often to put their stage clothes on before they are dried after having been washed."<sup>95</sup> This was a consequence of appearance being a crucial consideration for this group of child laborers. A fining system was set in place by employers to ensure that children paid close attention to cleanliness.<sup>96</sup> Employers defended the docking of a child's wage by claiming that this was positive discipline, "obligation itself induces a general habit of orderliness and tidiness."<sup>97</sup> That same obligation could also prove problematic for those child entertainers whose homes were steeped in, "misery and starvation, of squalor and vice."<sup>98</sup> Without the means to dry their rehearsal uniforms the wearing of wet clothing was more of a necessary evil than an exercise in cleanliness set by the industry. Damp clothes might well have compromised the health and comfort of children but crucially, for the child earner, the wearing of clean, damp clothes was at least fine free.<sup>99</sup> In terms of the incidence of tuberculosis though, the close contact with other workers in poor backstage conditions, provided an ideal environment for contagion.

The promotion of children as entertainers had them dressed in all manners of stage costumes. Child performers were particularly suited to fantasy themes that were popular with late Victorian family audience.<sup>100</sup> The industry's inclination to satisfy audience expectations of fairyland had many children performing in gossamer costumes and leaving little to the imagination.<sup>101</sup> This, coupled with a distinct lack of privacy backstage could adversely affect their long-term moral and psychological well-being. Barlee recognized this as a cause for concern:

The shock to any modest mind of the "undress" of these children is great and at first to the more respectable ones of their number a trying ordeal. One girl of fifteen when ordered to doff her clothing and habit herself on tights said she crouched down in a corner of a room with shame facedness and dared not rise until laughed out of her shyness. The same girl now sits unblushingly to photographers to be taken in all kinds of attitudes, all feminine modesty having long since departed.<sup>102</sup>

Barlee was eyewitness to an additional problem associated with the scanty costumes worn by young girls “the piercing cold of the Green Room almost paralysed her as she waited in the scanty Page’s clothing to go to the boards shivering from head to foot.”<sup>103</sup> These rare accounts contrasted sharply with the propagandist descriptions that were made more readily available to the public. Published versions were usually subject to positive embellishment “When the pantomime is going on they have warm dressing-rooms, and are assisted by dressers in assuming their gorgeous garbs.”<sup>104</sup> Such claims did not fit well with the coping strategies that more resilient children were known to have shared with their more naive peers. One raw recruit recalled being advised to “send and get 3d-worth of raw whiskey and drink it all down at once... You will find that will warm your blood fast enough. Not half of us could dance a bit if we did not take something of the kind to put power into our limbs.”<sup>105</sup>

Young entertainers were usually required to appear in several scenes that were often separated by long intervals.<sup>106</sup> During these waiting periods children were witnessed with their “teeth chattering from the bitter cold.”<sup>107</sup> Extremes of temperature between on and off stage led Barlee to conclude that “It is this that sows the seeds of consumption which carries off hundreds of their number.”<sup>108</sup> The decision of Theatrical Missionaries to implement a help scheme is symptomatic of the extent of labor-related welfare issues that could blight child performers. Missionaries told of “Visitations in homes or Hospitals especially in cases of accident and sickness, which are numerous... endured by the little ones who are compelled to perform for their amusement.”<sup>109</sup> The keenness, with which the late Victorian industry wished to promote childhood as one of its most profitable products, meant that child performers were posed and paraded in every guise and situation. Unsurprisingly, theatrical missionaries were as a consequence kept busy.

## WELFARE

While fairies shivered in a thin veil of material, other children sweltered inside theatrical animal skins. The demand for child performers who were skilled in animal representation was vast enough to earn a good livelihood for the purveyors of these children to theatres. There was a spectrum of suppliers that ranged from proprietors of professional training institutions who bound children by contract for many years

and small scale, individual entrepreneurs who worked from home in the poorest districts. One Missionary account gives valuable insight into this domestic industry:

She was of middle age, and had three miserable little children dependent upon her, as her husband had absconded. These, with several others whom she borrowed as business required, provided a good living, as she supplied several of the low theatres with imp children, used in pantomimes and plays to represent huge frogs, cats, and other animals, also angels and goblins. She was a large consumer of gin; and it was well known that she gave abundance to her children, to stop their growth, as they decreased in value as they increased in size. Employers at the theatres used to come to fit the skins and to instruct the children in their duties. These were of the most ludicrous kind, and her boy of six did the monkey so well that for two Christmas seasons he earned a pound a week.<sup>110</sup>

Wage rates for skilled children earned higher commission for their suppliers. Although the children were also beneficiaries of the greater earning capacity of animal impersonation, the work came with certain provisos. Firstly, animal outfits were tailored for a very close fit. One adult performer likened his animal costumes to “a wig for the body.”<sup>111</sup> “The tightness of the skin and want of ventilation endangers, if the character has to be maintained long, a sense of suffocation, impeding the child’s natural respiration.”<sup>112</sup> The practice was made all the more uncomfortable by the “hot, dry, airless and choking emissions from on-stage lighting and having to perfect the movements of the animal in a lifelike manner.”<sup>113</sup> This level of skill required prolonged, intensive instruction, and rehearsal. Profit-minded employers were keen to keep financial outlay to a minimum, therefore, a child previously trained and experienced in this art form would be continually reengaged. Although this secured the child regular work, the benefit was somewhat offset by cost-cutting exercises that proved detrimental to the welfare of the *growing* child. Fitted skins were difficult to obtain and costly to produce.<sup>114</sup> Replacements were kept to a minimum by forcing children into skins that they had outgrown. One London missionary reported that these children were made to act their parts the same while forced into a cramped position. He observed one boy being put through this and witnessed it “causing him torture.”<sup>115</sup> Animal representations were physically demanding in their own right without this additional challenge.<sup>116</sup> For instance, monkey representations required one boy to “swing himself from branch to branch of a tree, to hang by one hand, sit up on his haunches and crack nuts etc.”<sup>117</sup>

Missionary accounts provide insights into those anonymous individuals who operated at subsistence levels to prepare animal impersonators for the stage:

One afternoon the Missionary approached the door, which was partly open, and was startled by the stifled sobbing of the youngest,—a tiny girl of not quite five years. Upon entering the room he saw that the sobs proceeded from a blue fiend, which was wagging its forked tail and shaking its bat-wings upon the table, the woman standing over the creature with a cane. “This is shameful,” he exclaimed, taking the fiend into his arms; and then he burst the cord, and set the child free.<sup>118</sup>

These undesirable modes of theatrical costumes were regular features in spectacular productions, pageants, and pantomimes and children featured heavily in these. Such garbs can be seen to have encumbered the comfort and movement of stage children in a number of ways. Huge papier-mâché heads that helped to transform children into characters such as, imps, goblins, and monsters proved a great source of entertainment for those watching the proceedings.<sup>119</sup> For the ones who wear it, however, this headgear obscured their sight and hearing and impeded their ability to carry out their duties on stage, particularly in circumstances when the opportunity to actually rehearse in costume was truncated. Loose training clothes were worn during rehearsal weeks and the stage costume was usually first worn, in full, during the dress rehearsal.<sup>120</sup> “Sometimes when children are put into properties for the first time, they get into singular difficulties, walking on in wrong places, and getting stranded in out-of-the-way corners in a most helpless state.”<sup>121</sup> Employers unrealistically expected children to credibly act their roles in costumes whose design actively prevented them from doing so. The experience of one child highlights such difficulties:

What are you doing here? Yelled the manager to a largish specimen of the carrot tribe, which was aimlessly gyrating in the centre of a fairy water scene. “Please sir I’m a carrot and I’ve lost the other one,” said a feeble voice from inside. “Off you go,”—responded the excited manager—“Carrots are not in this scene.”<sup>122</sup>

The fashion for huge productions meant that the rehearsing of large casts was reminiscent of a complicated jigsaw puzzle necessitating the staggered rehearsal of each section before being pieced together as a whole.<sup>123</sup>



Figure 2.2 Rehearsing for a Pantomime, *The Graphic*, December 25, 1885.

The first dress rehearsal was sometimes an alarming experience for young children:

The principals with whom they have been brought into contact at rehearsals are no longer the men and women of everyday life, but creatures of surprising aspect—erratic as to hair, abnormal as to feature and sensational in complexion... At first the children are much puzzled and somewhat scared and quiet and curiously awed by so close association with such terrible and important beings.<sup>124</sup>

The trade newspaper *The Stage* evocatively described one vignette a journalist had witnessed:

The children were instructed to fall down in amused terror at the approach of the boy, but when on the first night in place of the friendly youth there appeared an enormous cat with glaring eyes and bushy tail which mewed and caterwauled in an awfully and terribly realistic manner, the two poor mice were seized with abject terror and screamed right lustily, and literally kicked with fright while the audience roared with laughter. The little ones refused to face Grimalkin again and the mice were cut out of that scene.<sup>125</sup>

Although this is a lighthearted account it is worth noting that the lost earnings of both children, from a large pantomime production, could well have been of considerable cost to the winter income of their families. Particularly, given the unpaid time and effort implied by preperformance preparations.

Rehearsals demanded commitment in exchange for the prospect of future earnings, but this was not guaranteed.<sup>126</sup> This is made clear from the testimony of a young ballet girl: “I beg to say that it is true about rehearsals. We have rehearsals from ten in the morning until five, then, sometimes in the evening.” A second girl claimed that “It is not generally known that we have to practice for four to six weeks... as soon as rehearsals are complete we have a night or two before the production to go to the theatre at twelve o’clock at night and rehearse to five or six in the morning.”<sup>127</sup> Ellen Terry also recalled that as a child “rehearsals lasted all day, Sundays included, and when there was no play running at night, until 4 or 5 the next morning... sometimes I could hardly keep my eyes open when I was on stage.”<sup>128</sup> How this translated into actual terms of work is apparent from the children interviewed by Barlee:

With delicate children, it is wonderful indeed how their constitutions stand the exhaustive hours of their work, especially before they have arrived at the stage of wage-winning, when their food is of the scantiest kind and quality. On

asking one of these children to give an account of her hours of labor—and it is in busy season a fair sample of most such exercises—she said, “We go ma’am, at ten in a morning on rehearsal days and practice until three.” (There ain’t no seats to sit down on was the information she volunteered.) . . . Then from four to seven we rehearse again . . . then the theatre opens and we have to be alive to do our parts nice. It closes after past eleven at night. “And how glad you must be to go home to bed!” “We haven’t always done then ma’am. Sometimes we’re wanted to stay and rehearse again.” The last repetition is, however, I fancy an *extraordinary* occurrence; at least it is hoped so.<sup>129</sup>

Setting aside any additional demands created by post-performance rehearsals, the everyday workload was in itself time absorbing and labor intensive. Demands increased along with the industry’s wide adoption of the long run in its bid to cater to burgeoning mass spectatorship. Spectacular productions and pantomimes were particularly suited to this format and included large numbers of children. These productions could run for months at a time with each performance lasting for several hours. Pantomimes were particularly lengthy. On Boxing night 1904 a new record was set by Mr (Arthur) Collins as *The White Cat* ran from “half-past seven until twenty-five minutes to two on Tuesday morning.”<sup>130</sup> More typical was one production of *Cinderella* that featured large numbers of children who saw the curtain rise at half-past seven and its final fall at midnight.<sup>131</sup> Children spent a protracted period within the workplace and this alternated between performing on stage and waiting backstage. In 1889, the Archbishop of Canterbury acknowledged that child entertainers “were occupied 15 hours a day at their books, rehearsal and performances before the audience.”<sup>132</sup> What percentage of the working day was spent “at their books” is debatable. Schooling or the lack of it was at the heart of the latter part of the nineteenth-century debate concerning stage employment. Childhood historians have argued that education legislators were successful in their undertaking to alter the late Victorian child’s identity from worker to scholar. However, this largely overlooks the situation of child entertainers and the fact that legislation on education had little bearing on their particular status as workers.

Contemporary commentators support the notion that education laws were ineffective when it came to the schooling of this group of children. Millicent Fawcett echoed the thoughts of the National Vigilance Association (NVA) when she claimed:

Some say that theatre children ought not to be interfered with because their employment is at night after school hours and therefore does not interfere with their education . . . but this is not true. The rehearsals, the practising and some of the performances take place during the school day during school hours.<sup>133</sup>

Children and their families, particularly from the poorer quarters, were accused of aiding and abetting employers in employment that kept them from school. "A large number of this class of children in any circumstances escape by various strategy the clutches of the School Board altogether."<sup>134</sup> Those who were well placed to profit from the employment of child performers vigorously counterargued this point. Actor-manager Henry Irving claimed that "it was not by any means impossible for them to get a considerable amount of schooling."<sup>135</sup> Manager Augustus Harris told that he knew of "four distinguished actresses who owed their success very largely to the fact that that they were brought up in the theatre which was to them both nursery and a schoolroom."<sup>136</sup> This though contrasts sharply with recollections from Ellen Terry of the respected theatrical family. She recalled that as a leading child actress, she never went to school.<sup>137</sup> One way that some larger employers deflected criticism was to announce provision of a schoolroom in their theatres.<sup>138</sup> However, from what we know of the cramped and noisy atmosphere backstage this setting would not have provided an environment conducive to study. Also, the demanding regime of theatrical work left little time or energy for backstage learning. Children were sent out of the theatre during periods when they were not required; therefore it is difficult to envisage how any useful or regular patterns of education was established backstage. Similarly, it was not viable for children to use their free time between rehearsal and performance to attend their local schools. Not only would it be difficult to explain sporadic attendance but travelling back and forth on public transport, would dilute their take home pay and walking was costly both in terms of time and energy.

As the popularity of child performers grew demand meant that touring became a prominent feature of their work. This brought additional problems of its own "It must be confessed that their life in the numerous touring companies that now exist is anything but a happy one."<sup>139</sup> Among the labor force of theatrical children those on tour were the least likely to have access to education, free time, or protection. Their workload was exacerbated as the usual Sunday rest day was spent traveling to the next town. Although non-touring children had to fend for themselves during the times, they were turned out of theatres or when traveling home late at night, at least they operated in a locale familiar to them. Touring children played in a series of anonymous venues far from the support of family or friends. As Gertrude Tuckwell's testimony highlights, touring children were some of the most vulnerable child laborers of the late nineteenth century. "I heard not long ago of the case of two

London children left behind, almost destitute in Scotland, by the little company with which they were travelling, because they had ceased to be needed by their employers."<sup>140</sup> This statement is particularly telling when we consider that it appeared some five years after the addition of a clause in the 1889 Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act that was supposed to address the situation of child performers. It is clear that while children remained popular with audiences the industry was committed to supplying this demand regardless of obstacles put before them or the cost to the child.

Performances made by children remained obvious favorites among audiences. Reviews regularly focused upon their appeal. For instance, the children in one production of *Red Riding Hood* were hailed with "shouts of satisfaction" from the audience.<sup>141</sup> There was, however, some ambiguity surrounding this level of success. On the one hand, such adulation was a key incentive informing their initial entry into the industry. On the other hand, children could become victims of their own popularity. The most fervent audience adulation could add to an already overstretched workload. In the industry's eagerness to, provide the paying public with what it wanted, employers indulged their audiences, sometimes at the expense of their child employees. For example, one large troupe of children who danced the, "infantile hornpipe evoked such loud manifestations of approval that it had to be twice repeated."<sup>142</sup> Similar reports included the dance of the dolls, a ballet performed by "Katti Lanner's little pupils of the National Training School of Dancing, [which] had to be repeated last night, so gracefully did the children perform the figures of the dance."<sup>143</sup> Although as shown above, emotional reward was prized by child performers, it is not clear if these highly applauded impromptu repeat performances were matched by monetary remuneration. Theatre managers were willing to pay in excess of the going wage rate for children who took the public's taste.<sup>144</sup> It is worth noting that child performers were usually bound by contract that could dictate that their pay was set for several years at a fixed fee.<sup>145</sup> Although popularity increased bargaining power for trainer/agents, any rising profit is unlikely to have found its way into the pockets of the children. It is clear, though, that popularity led to unscheduled performances and added to the already overlong workday. One daily regime was described thus:

The audience who applaud the gaily clad adroit creatures who perform before them know little of the many hours labor and practice that are represented by a scene or a dance, and do not know that the artists have most likely walked

long distances to rehearsals, probably in bad weather, and that after protracted exercise, they have to walk home again, weary hungry and seldom to any very luxurious meal.<sup>146</sup>

NVA member Annette Bear was one of a minority of individuals who recognized the adverse effect of theatrical working hours and conditions. She described a group of post-performance children who were homeward bound from London's Crystal Palace Theatre:

Their weary way consisted of two train journeys and thence on foot, where they would arrive about midnight supposing they had missed neither train. There were perhaps a dozen children of all ages in our compartment. The younger ones were dreadfully fagged and were evidently dead beat they leaned listlessly against the carriage or against each other in attitudes of complete exhaustion. I was totally unprepared to see the children so totally fatigued, more especially as they had not had their usual afternoon performance as well as the evening one on that occasion.<sup>147</sup>

Bear's sentiments demonstrate that little had changed over the previous five years to improve the lives of young "jobbing" performers. Back then Barlee had witnessed similar scenes. "When dismissed after the theatre classes, say between eleven and twelve pm, the poor children have to transverse the streets: dry or wet, snow and cold, to their homes often a mile or two away; and many a policeman in his nightly rounds can testify to finding one or other of such wet, weary, little ones asleep on some doorstep, too worn out to reach her home."<sup>148</sup>

The prospect of relatively generous wages and the opportunity to perform before an adoring public were persuasive incentives for children to tolerate the demands of the job and these inducements created a compliant workforce. To reinforce deference "strict discipline was imposed in the theatre."<sup>149</sup> This was promoted as a positive strategy, "the children having inculcated into them the three principles of obedience, cleanliness and punctuality."<sup>150</sup> They were "taught the best of all discipline—unquestioning obedience to those in authority."<sup>151</sup>

The theatrical child's reward was to be allowed to perform before an audience but this did not come without penalty. Time in the spotlight was the incentive that extracted many hours of hard physical work from the children. The strict disciplinary nature of training and rehearsal led contemporary comment to liken this process to a military exercise. Descriptions included "army," "ranks," and "drill." Although narratives regularly implied the harshness of the work endured by the theatrical child,

they invariably included a validation of it. When asked if the training process was painful, one ballet mistress replied “well I am afraid that I must admit it is . . . practice in the schools lasts from three to four hours daily and to gain the suppleness of limb this is necessary, absolutely necessary.”<sup>152</sup> Another observer justified the means by the end reward. “The expectation of the pretty dresses they are to wear and the importance attached to the coming appearance, seem to deprive the necessary drill of all its tediousness and monotony.”<sup>153</sup> The industry enjoyed an oversubscribed force of willing child labor and theatrical children were aware that there were any number of replacements waiting eagerly by the stage door eager to strip them of their income and celebrity. This knowledge ensured that theatrical children learnt to, “obey the word of command.”<sup>154</sup> Evidence indicates the extent of conformity the industry was able to extract from its child employees. “The children are so completely under the control of their instructor, that any special work they are required to do is learnt in a few lessons.”<sup>155</sup>

There was inordinate stress and responsibility for everyone involved in heavily invested productions where fortunes could be won or lost. There was no margin for error on stage where the merchandise was concurrently forged and consumed. Children were all too aware of the pressure for them to perform well. One backstage observer recalled the distress of, “Four little maidens in an evident state of fluster . . . the reason being a certain music had been forgotten, ‘Oh she will be so cross’ pleaded one little damsel of seven.”<sup>156</sup> This evidence is rather tame when compared to more disturbing practices witnessed by George Sala in France during the 1860s. “Child ballet-girl-rats *d’opéra* as the poor fated innocents are termed at present, serving their apprenticeship under slaps and pinches, and stripes from the ballet-master’s switch.”<sup>157</sup> Similar concern in Britain was justified. Some trainers ruled with a rod of iron and expected nothing less than perfection.

Phyllis Bedells’ described her instruction under one particular ballet mistress:

Cavalazzi could have inspired a log of wood. And she had a frightening temper; if her pupils displeased her she frequently picked up a chair and threw it against the wall. I have known her lay hands on two girls and knock their heads together. After these bouts of fury she invariably flung out of the room, and we heard her swearing in Italian. Her anger spent; she would return and with tears in her eyes speak falteringly and quietly to us all, “Darleens, darleens, what for you do theese to me?”<sup>158</sup>



**Figure 2.3** MME. CAVALAZZI and pupil.—Mme. Cavalazzi was a famous ballerina in her youth. She has been for four years in charge of the Metropolitan School of Ballet Dancing in New York, and has just retired. She used sometimes to rouse a careless pupil smartly with her big stick Willa Sibert Cather, “TRAINING FOR THE BALLET: Making American Dancers” *McClure’s Magazine*, 41 (October 1913): 85–95, 92. <http://cather.unl.edu/nf004.html> last updated May 2015.

Of course, the practices used in tutoring and rehearsal were beyond public scrutiny as they were conducted behind the curtain. The face that the industry presented to the public was veiled by secrecy, glamour, and illusion. Also, the press were invariably complementary about Lanner and her colleagues. Bedells provides a valuable first-hand account that gives an alternative perspective on Lanner. “I can see her now, sitting in the prompt corner, yelling at the corps de ballet, if she saw the slightest defect in their work or if they were out of line.”<sup>159</sup> Bedells’ personal experience of Lanner also reveals the business women behind Lanner the celebrity:

She was not particularly nice to me; but I am very glad I came into contact with her. There is no doubt that she was a great influence on the ballet of the

day... Madame Lanner was none too pleased at my being engaged, as she had quite a number of her own pupils whom she naturally thought ought to have been given the opportunity.<sup>160</sup>

One rare account supports Bedells sentiments and confirms Lanner to be a particularly formidable character:

The home of the English ballet was ruled by Madame Katti Lanner and ruled despotically. "Don't let Katti Lanner have it all her own way"; said George Edwardes to the author of *Round the Ballet*, the author decided not to, and as we sat together watching a rehearsal he interfered-once. The old lady came down to the footlights and peered into the darkened theatre, "It is not your ballet now; it is mine!" she called imperiously.<sup>161</sup>

Clearly, fear mongering and actual violence played their part in the training "to perfection" of children. This helped employers to keep children in check and was also underpinned by a widening of the fining system.

The key incentive that had child recruits flocking to the industry was also used as a means to control its child workforce. The entertainment industry offered late Victorian children a rare opportunity to earn, fining proved an effective tool of discipline especially for those coming from poorer backgrounds. Lateness was a fineable offence that put much pressure on the children. As Vanbrugh put it, "It is such a rushing, busy existence that every moment counts... if you want to succeed be punctual. Careless casual folk find life hard behind the footlights... and those who are content to dawdle along murmuring, 'It doesn't matter if I am five minutes late!' will find themselves very badly beaten in the end."<sup>162</sup> Negligence at work was also a fineable offence.<sup>163</sup> Matters of personal hygiene were also covered by the fining system. Whereas in the majority of trades a worker's appearance was generally unimportant, it became a priority in the theatrical industry. Clearly, children recognized the implications of cleanliness for their being allowed to perform and to earn. Even the baby section of the ballet, according to one witness, could be found standing around back stage "in little groups discussing the comparative cleanliness of their chubby little hands."<sup>164</sup> It is worth noting here that in some of the larger theatres, the fines that were used as a deterrent also incorporated an element of incentive. Ivor Guest claims that at some theatres the "accumulated penalties [were] distributed among the well-behaved at Christmas time."<sup>165</sup>

From its insistence on cleanliness to the risking of life and limb on the high wire the industry demanded much from its child labor force. The moral welfare, education, and health of the theatrical child was repeatedly

compromised under the guise of entertainment. Throughout the period that celebrated the sentimentalized ideal of childhood, the backstage identity of child performers remained that of an exploited worker. By accepting a backstage identity the child worker was able to trade its accompanying hardships and sacrifices for an illusionary, yet invaluable public and celebrated stage persona.

The content of the work which children undertook on the stage mirrored that which was assumed during training and rehearsal. However, it was the presence of an audience which altered its nature and transformed the child's identity from that of employee to that of performer. The way the stage-child was perceived by an audience had a huge bearing not only on the child's attraction to theatrical work but also to the widespread sanctioning and continued employment of their labor. Lifelong actress and former child star Marie Bancroft could hardly be described as a "jobbing" performer. However, reminisces of her childhood reveal a difficult contradiction between the emotionality and physicality of her work. "I was of course much petted by the public; but oh! The work! My poor little body was often sadly tired."<sup>166</sup> The magnitude of this dichotomy for less-fortunate child performers provides much food for thought.

### 3. The Performing Child and Its Audience

The previous chapters have established theatrical children as the industry's labor, raw material, and finished product and as such they straddled the manufacturing, retail, and service industries. Although children were part of the production process, they were also present at the point of purchase and party to the consumer's enjoyment of the product. Because of this and the nature of the merchandise, child performers, unlike other child workers, developed a bond with those who purchased the product and their services. Of the connection between the performer and the audience, Clement Scott sensed how "a communicative electric chord runs between the two."<sup>1</sup> This implies an intimate relationship between strangers. The connection was intense yet at the same time transient and fleeting, lasting only for the duration of the performance and among an assemblage of individuals who happened to make the audience unique to that occasion. The dramatic critic Clayton Hamilton was of this mind:

Traits in theatre audiences differ from other kinds of crowds. In the first place, a theatre audience is composed of individuals more heterogeneous than those that make up a political, or social, or sporting, or religious convocation. The crowd at a foot-ball game, at a church, at a social or political convention, is by its very purpose selective of its elements.<sup>2</sup>

The common denominator that transformed a group of individuals into a theatrical audience was simply a desire to be entertained. However, although this yearning was collective, expectations of the same were manifold. The success of the industry depended upon its ability to create productions that were able to sustain a mass audience. Contemporary opinion claimed, "It follows that the dramatist must be broader in his appeal than any other artist... In the same single work of art he must incorporate elements that will interest all classes of humankind."<sup>3</sup> Performer and spectator mutually

laid themselves bare to the open expression of a whole range of emotions within the context of the production. This unusual bond allowed a collective, public demonstrations of what, in the nineteenth century, were often regarded as quite private emotions and these shared experiences were sustained long after the falling of the final curtain.

The audience was a powerful medium that could hold the success or failure of a production within the clapping of its hands. Contemporary comment was clear on this:

It is high time that managers should be taught their position...they must remember that it is we who are the customers and they are only the shopkeepers. The stage waits upon the audience, and the audience rehearses its collective and inevitable laugh. It performs. It communicates itself, and art is a communication... They are a thousand London people; and no genius, or no imbecility, amongst them has any effect upon that secure sovereignty of a number.<sup>4</sup>

Positive audience response translated into profit and this was the industry's ultimate goal and producers sought ways to manipulate the power of the audience to work in their favor. Psychological interaction was key to mass enjoyment of a production. One strategy regularly adopted was for a theatre manager, or indeed an individual performer, to pay a group within the audience to initiate appropriate responses in order to stimulate the rest of the audience and encourage them to follow suit:

Hired applauders [are] seated in the centre of the house. The leader of the *claque* knows his cues as if he were an actor in the piece, and at the psychological (sic) moment the *claqueurs* burst forth with their clatter and start the house applauding. Applause begets applause in the theatre, as laughter begets laughter and tears beget tears.<sup>5</sup>

Clauquing clearly proved a popular and effective tactic. The practice was adopted regularly enough for it to be satirized in the press. *The Playgoer* reported:

For the convenience of the acting managers on first nights we append a scale of claque charges corrected to date. Ordinary applause 5s... Frantic applause £1... Laughter 3s... Exclamation of delight 1s... Tears wiped away 10/6. Tears wiped away and nose blown £5.<sup>6</sup>

It is worth noting that certain sections of the audience were also aware of how highly the industry valued their interaction. Those so inclined could

actively use this knowledge to their own advantage. Groups (usually young men) would approach managers or performers and threaten to react negatively to the performance unless they received a sum of money. "At certain of the music halls the gallery boys have a happy knack of blackmailing the comiques whose chorus they sing."<sup>7</sup> Crucially, the popularity of individual performers was key to their continued employment, and this was dependent on audience approval or disappointment. Therefore, those performers compromised by claquers were likely to subscribe to their demands. One music hall comedian was reported to have "only weighed in a bob but this could pay dividends for his future relationship with his audience."<sup>8</sup> The industry's deference to audience preference made the wide appeal of the late Victorian child performer all the more valuable. The popularity of child entertainers was systematically cultivated by producers to such an extent that the lines between supply and demand became blurred. Supply became the leading force in moving the market forward. A media-based propagandist publicity campaign kept child performers in the public eye, sustained audience interest, and generated a continued desire to watch child-themed and child-centered productions.

## PERFORMERS AND THEIR AUDIENCES

Phyllis Dare, recalled her childhood experience of the unashamed promotion of young performers. During the course of one day she encountered, "the representatives of no less than eighteen papers called to see me between two and five o'clock in the afternoon."<sup>9</sup> Publicity-generated fan worship equated with profit for theatrical employers. Further reminiscences from Dare are testament to this:

For weeks after my appearance I felt like a freak, as so much publicity had been given to my appearance. I seemed to be recognised everywhere—even in all sorts of way out places. One morning for instance after rehearsal when I was leaving the theatre we were almost mobbed by a crowd of several hundred people who had collected outside the stage door and followed us down the Strand.<sup>10</sup>

While maximum profit was a priority for employers and for some parents, financial attainment was not usually the key draw for stage-children. An audience provided the theatrical child with the means to adopt a public persona and this facilitated the real benefits that came with the taking on of a fictitious identity. Popularity, adulation, celebrity status, and

possible social mobility were elements available to all child entertainers. This applied to the famed child protégée down to the child super regardless of age, gender, or class. These rewards came at a price. Prospective child performers first had to accept and conform to the backstage demands of the work. Public perception that held performers in such high esteem, meant that although child performers were fully visible to them on stage, audiences were not best placed to recognize them as child *laborers*.<sup>11</sup> To its audience, the perceived working environment of a stage-child formed the antithesis of connotations that constituted a workplace. Audiences sought and found temporary respite from the trials and tribulations of work and daily life within the world of entertainment. Contemporary observation makes this clear:

To say that this performance amuses the audience could convey a very faint and inadequate idea of their demeanour. They rock with laughter, the whole pit swaying like a field of wheat in the breeze. Those who assert that the London poor are a joyless class, incapable of merriment should see this crowd when genuinely amused, and consider whether there is not some exaggeration in description of their hopeless gloom.<sup>12</sup>

Because the theatrical industry was located in the world of leisure, audience perceptions of performer's lifestyles were based on illusion rather than on reality. This was particularly true of young performers, not least because theatrical children were employed in their greatest numbers as happy or comical characters set in joyous, magical, or fairyland surroundings. Additionally, any serious representations of childhood were theatrically sanitized versions of real-life experiences. This is perhaps not surprising given a contemporary consensus within the industry that, "The public wanted to be entertained and to have its emotions exercised—it certainly did not want to be required to think."<sup>13</sup> One commentator shows that this understanding worked well for both the audience and the industry:

And since the crowd is partisan it wants its favoured characters to win. Hence the convention of the "happy ending," insisted on by managers who feel the pulse of the public. The blind Louise, in *The Two Orphans*, will get her sight back, never fear. Even the wicked Oliver, in *As You Like It*, must turn over a new leaf and marry a pretty girl.<sup>14</sup>

It is clear from Ellen Barlee's observations that audiences identified with the *characters* on stage, yet, knew little of the children who represented them or the realities of life for those children outside the parameters of the stage.

On witnessing audience reaction toward one child acrobat Barlee thought it strange that “an audience composed principally of persons who were themselves parents, could countenance such performances. Yet the cheering was tremendous.”<sup>15</sup> However, the audience was less informed than was Barlee about the physical toll this performance took on the child. They were left unaware that the performance left the child “frightfully exhausted; her face was flushed a deep crimson . . . she trembled in every limb, while it was some time before she could speak . . . so great had been the physical efforts she had put forth . . . The little girl was an orphan whose training had commenced in infancy.”<sup>16</sup> Theatrical producers relied upon audience misconceptions like this as they were crucial to the perpetuation of theatrical child labor and the industry’s ability to profit from its child employees.

The more child performers took the public taste the more the industry exploited their profitable popularity. For the theatrical child this translated into a busy workload. This was particularly true of children employed to play principal characters.<sup>17</sup> Such parts placed a great deal of responsibility on the performing child. Often the reputation of the production was riding upon the talent of its central characters. Children needed to live up to the expectations of both their employers and their audience. Added responsibility was accompanied by longer rehearsal hours. For example, as Richard Foulkes has observed, a child hired to play the part of Alice from the works of Lewis Carrol was required to learn “no less than 215 speeches.” Rehearsals plus nightly shows with a “second performance, on matinee days which lasted till after half past ten at night” comprised a demanding schedule.<sup>18</sup> Each performance of the same production was unique to its ever shifting audience composition.<sup>19</sup> This allowed the industry to repeatedly resell the same product to the public while the ever changing dynamics of its audience disguised the effect that this was having on the workload of the theatrical child worker.

The missionary, Pearl Fisher (possibly a pseudonym), was aware of the demanding nature of this form of child labor:

Many are trained to the profession from babyhood. There are those who have been taken on the stage in “long clothes”, children who at the age of six years can say they have been four years in the profession, children who at the age of nine have already crossed the Atlantic four times to perform in the United States!<sup>20</sup>

She also told of the child who was advertised as the “The Tiniest Dancer in the Universe” who, “is now only six years of age, has been in the music hall profession four years, [and] can earn by three performances nightly from

a guinea to thirty shillings.” Fisher offered further examples that included “Louie a bright-faced little thing... Only ten years of age and with her is her brother of six, both on the stage, ‘You won’t have to play often,’ I said, ‘Twelve performances in the week, sir.’ It seemed to my mind a cruel and killing work for such a child.”<sup>21</sup>

The hectic schedule of child actress Vera Beringer was stimulated and sustained by her popularity with her audiences.<sup>22</sup> In 1888, while nine years of age, Beringer was cast in the lead role of *The Real Little Lord Fauntleroy*.<sup>23</sup> Originally scheduled for a run of five matinees, the production opened at *Terry’s Theatre* London on May 14, 1888.<sup>24</sup> In reality, apart from two short recuperation holidays, Vera Beringer continually played the part of Lord Fauntleroy both on tour and in static productions from May 14, 1888 to January 11, 1890.<sup>25</sup> Her retirement from the stage was announced toward the end of that year.<sup>26</sup> The reason given for this was to allow the child to receive an education. This might well have been an important consideration, however, it is useful to note that Beringer’s acclaimed reviews were becoming more muted. One critic suggesting that she appeared to “have lost her bloom.”<sup>27</sup> The observation from Lewis Carroll, one of Beringer’s staunchest fans, revealed “Vera is losing her spirit and naturalness a little.”<sup>28</sup> Once the reality of theatrical work became apparent on stage, it diminished a child’s allure and potential profit margins. Responses to Beringer’s retirement are telling. “She will take a benefit at Christmas as a sort of farewell to childhood, and to provide the school fees.”<sup>29</sup> “We cordially trust that Miss Vera Beringer may have a good ‘rest’ at school and may in young womanhood gain fresh histrionic honours.”<sup>30</sup>

That same year the death of Leicester Windust, principal actor with an all-child touring company, was reported in *The Stage*. Although the cause of his illness is not made clear, it is telling that his only obituary praises the fact that, until days before he died, Leicester had missed not one of almost a thousand performances in the previous three years.<sup>31</sup>

Although Leicester’s death might not have been directly related to his work, realistically the sustained demands made upon him had the potential to leave even a physically fit child vulnerable to illness and fatigue. This is something that was not readily evident to the public given that their general understanding of theatrical work was based on media’s promotion of the public personas of stage-children.

Entertainer, Belle Bilton, joined the profession at 13 years of age. She was so often “interviewed, photographed, [and] publicised through post-cards” that she became widely known to her public, yet, few would identify with one contemporary claim that “what should have been the rest of her

girlhood, became a tough apprenticeship served in provincial shows and pantomime.<sup>32</sup> On stage, the child performer both packaged and sold an idealized notion of childhood, yet the audience, through individual interpretation purchased its tangible existence. Children may not have necessarily understood the varied motivations that informed the public's desire to see them, they did though enjoy the combined response that their performances evoked.

### THE CHILD'S PERCEPTION OF AN AUDIENCE

Although clear parallels can be drawn between theatrical child labor and other child occupations, one aspect of the former remains distinct to the theatrical child. This was the relationship between the child performer and an audience. Interaction between the two had a major effect on the perception of theatrical child labor at a time when educational legislation had, in the words of James Walvin, "effectively ended the nation's commitment to widespread child labour."<sup>33</sup> Audience appreciation of a child's performance both condoned and encouraged the continued use of children as entertainers. This is not to suggest that the majority of child performers were subordinate and abused victims of preying employers and ruthless parents. Plenty of evidence suggests that this group of children exercised agency and were compliant in their continued employment. One successful actress typically demonstrates high levels of theatrical ambition among children, "When I was a trifle over 13 years old I was smitten with stage fever. It wasn't a mild attack either. I was perfectly mad to be an actress."<sup>34</sup> Clearly, because the reality of theatre work was carried out in the unknown, in an untouchable world backstage, to the outsider, performing appeared to be an extremely attractive pastime. It was not until children stepped behind the curtain that the true nature of the work was revealed to them. Celebrity and glamour were born out of audience misconceptions created by the industry and it was in a child performer's own interest to keep alive this false impression of the work. Although theatrical employment generated financial gain, it also offered its workers a priceless commodity—emotional reward. During a performance, stage-children would sing the same songs, dance the same steps, and speak the same lines that they had practised innumerable times in the private, backstage domain. When theatrical children alighted on to the public stage it was still in their capacity as employees, yet, on stage the whole nature of their work was transformed. The key to this conversion

was the presence of an audience. Once in front of their public the child's identity shifted from that of worker to performer. This was the key that coerced the child into accepting its demanding laboring duties. While the full nature of stage-children's labors stayed hidden under a "veil of secrecy," the envy and adulation of the audience remained theirs. One former child actress offers an insight into the extent to which performers valued and even craved audience approval. "I had sometimes, during those sparkling days, wondered what it would feel like if that gossamer illusion ceased and I found myself without the mantle of love given to me by that public."<sup>35</sup> The desire to be appreciated and elevated from the crowds was both classless and universal. "To be 'Stage-Struck' is as common among the uneducated as among the educated."<sup>36</sup>

Oral testimony has revealed insights into the attraction of so many poorer children to the stage and suggests that monetary reward, though important, was secondary to the agency attached to the work. For those children used to being seen and not heard within the home, the stage was a place to shine. In the full glare of the spotlight the stage-child was the center of attention. The paying public watched and listened attentively to the children on stage and rewarded them with their enthusiastic responses. The work permitted disadvantaged children to be "taken from the crowded rooms or the courts where they prowl about in the evening."<sup>37</sup> Then at least for the time they spent on stage, they became a "proud and happy lot."<sup>38</sup>

Audience appreciation might appear to have been an obvious lure to the less advantaged child. However, it is worth noting that while children from the better-off classes would have enjoyed a more comfortable existence, they could just as easily have been starved of parental attention. Thad Logan has shown that the parlor in the middle-class home was "the designated scene of culturally mandated domestic bliss, it was an appropriate setting for a reunion each evening of mother, father and children . . . In households that could afford a nurse, however, children for the most part were neither seen nor heard in the parlour."<sup>39</sup> Sarah Mitchell has shown that "parents in better circumstances were supported by nursery maids, governesses and boarding schools. The idealized loving mother probably only spent an hour or two with her children each day."<sup>40</sup> An exception to this was the previously mentioned practice of "at homes." Barlee observed how, "in private society of a high and refined class, private theatricals are the favourite pastime of the hour."<sup>41</sup> "At Homes," took place in the parlor setting and so offered middle-class children a rare opportunity to capture the attention and approval of their parents and guests who watched them

perform. This small scale, yet much prized attention, was multiplied a thousand times when children transferred their “at home” performances to the public stage and its mass audience. Applause attention and adulation were huge inducements to child performers, and all but guaranteed their compliance with the backstage demands of theatrical work. Adults concerned themselves with the economic rewards of theatrical work and in particular the destination of the child performer’s wage.<sup>42</sup> Both employers and campaigners against child stage labor emphasized the significance of wages in labor supply. Neither side, however, appeared to recognize the performing experience from the child’s point of view. Although what was purchased with the theatrical wage could significantly influence the child’s standard of living, the child itself usually had little control over what was bought. Setting aside a minority of child actors from privileged backgrounds, the majority of stage-children handed over their wages to their parents.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, although for adults, the child’s wage was crucial; for the children themselves financial reward was often only a secondary consideration.

While their economic worth was up for public discussion performing children took pleasure in having their emotional worth reaffirmed through appreciative applause. The childhood experience of actress Hermione Gingold demonstrates that a receptive audience could be both seductive and addictive to an aspiring stage-child. Remembering her first impromptu performance on a visit to a sea-side show she wrote, “they invited children in the audience to come up on their platform, and I raced up to sing a song. . . . The applause went to my head like champagne. . . . from that moment on I devoted all my time to begging my parents to allow me to go on stage.”<sup>44</sup> To a child this was a priceless commodity and one that can be difficult to articulate to nonperformers. In her autobiography child actress, Irene Vanbrugh, described the experience as “intangible. . . . that lovely burst of applause which is so much more than the clapping of hands. It makes you believe in fairies.”<sup>45</sup> The actual performance was the sole aspect of the work over which the child had some control and might find, on a personal level, most rewarding. Stage personas enabled children to cling to the symbols of an “idealized childhood” through the characters they represented.

Child-themed productions, such as pantomime, allowed young performers to inhabit the world of fairyland and fantasy. The popular spectacular productions of the day gave children the opportunity to wear costumes that in reality they could only dream about. Numerous newspaper reviews made much of the magnificent attire worn on stage.<sup>46</sup> As one observer

shows the prospect of wearing beautiful outfits often served as an incentive to rehearse. “Before they make their public appearance there is a long and tiresome training to go through . . . the expectation of the pretty dresses they are to wear and the importance attached to the coming appearance, seem to deprive the necessary drill of all its tediousness and monotony.”<sup>47</sup> During the campaign against theatrical child labor, detractors acknowledged the attraction of beautiful costumes although they viewed this as being disadvantageous to the children. For example, a report in the *Pall Mall Gazette* suggested that:

Another drawback is that amid the tinsel splendours of the stage they acquire a taste for finery which later on leads to all kinds of mischief, and unfits them for work in any other station in life. The acting and posing deprive them, in a great many cases, of the naturalness of their teens.<sup>48</sup>

The reality was that children spent only a fraction of their time adorned in beautiful attire. During protracted rehearsal hours young girls wore “short shabby ballet or ordinary skirts and loose linen or flannel knickerbockers.”<sup>49</sup> What detractors did not recognize was that the costumes alone were not the key attraction. Stage-wear facilitated children’s transformation into the characters that could reduce audiences to tears or evoke laughter. On stage, children were able to adopt the personas that audiences loved, admired, sympathized with, or were amazed by. As one writer observed, this was crucial to the success of a production:

The primary purpose of a play is to give a gathered multitude a larger sense of life by evoking its emotions to a consciousness of terror and pity, laughter and love. Its purpose is not primarily to rouse the intellect to thought or call the will to action. In so far as the drama uplifts and edifies the audience, it does so, not by precept or by syllogism, but by emotional suggestion.<sup>50</sup>

Children were particularly proficient in the art of evoking a range of emotions from the late Victorian audience:

The stage child is much admired by the audience. Its pathos makes them weep; its tragedy thrills them; its declamation as for instance when it takes the centre of the stage and says it will kill the wicked man, and the police, and everybody who hurts it stirs them like a trumpet note; and its light comedy is generally held to be the most truly humorous thing in the whole range of dramatic art.<sup>51</sup>

This ability to provoke such responses gave children influence and control over the masses who were beguiled by their performances. “It’s the power

of moving others by my pathos . . . of seeing hundreds of faces change and soften as I speak. I would not give up the stage for anything on earth, no, not to save my life from hell."<sup>52</sup>

Children performed before a collective audience for collective applause, but according to contemporary comment, audiences identified with a performance in two ways: "The first is by imitation of what we have already seen around us; and the second is by suggestion of what we have already experienced within us."<sup>53</sup> Therefore, a child's performance had the potential to satisfy a variety of audience needs. Those who watched ranged from the innocent onlooker to the more sinister spectator. Exactly what the child represented at any given performance was determined by the spectator's own interpretations of the child's gestures, dress, and dialogue. This ensured that an audience left the auditorium contented and with a mind to revisit the theatre.

#### THE AUDIENCE'S VIEW OF THE PERFORMING CHILD

Perhaps the simplest relationship between audience and performer was that of the children who made up both. The reshaping of production allied to commercial incentives brought families into theatres on a scale never before seen. Trips to the theatre became integral to the emergent social life and culture of Victorian children. "It is a good sign when the dress circle is filled with children night after night."<sup>54</sup> Enjoyment of child-themed and child-centered productions presented middle-class child audiences, in particular, with situations they could directly relate to. Child-focused productions often drew on the world of the nursery in spectacular performances that brought toys to life on stage. Typical presentations included, *The Dance of The Dolls*; *The Grand Ballet of Toys*; and *The Menagerie of Noah's Ark*.<sup>55</sup> Scenes like this had the potential to spark the imaginative powers of children who watched in ways that could enhance play with their own toys at home.<sup>56</sup> This helped to secure a rising generation of future theatregoers.

Children were extensively hired to play out fantasy roles and were called upon to represent toys, fairies, animals, and such like. Yet, when children were required to play the role of *children*, their stage characters were sometimes depicted as defenceless targets of adult neglect or cruelty. Crozier has demonstrated how, during the 1880s the child was represented on the stage as being vulnerable and in need of protection.<sup>57</sup> Away

from the stage, Behlmer has shown the 1880s to be a time when “anti-cruelty groups emerged and reflected a growing public concern for child welfare.”<sup>58</sup> Late nineteenth-century child protection work was based on a complex set of fundamental interests. Reform movements whose ethos was the protection of children endeavored to universalize a bourgeois family model. The theatrical world’s representation of this was satisfying to those who accepted for real the social and imaginative construct of childhood at that time.<sup>59</sup> The ideology of separate spheres, portraying Victorian women as essentially domestic creatures, emphasized the importance of the physical and emotional bonds between mothers and their children.<sup>60</sup> For middle-class women, outings to the theatre in the company of their children to watch other children could be seen as an extension of their domestic role.<sup>61</sup> The central place given to children on the stage and the nature of the entertainment itself, all served to reinforce a woman’s status as mother, wife, and as the mainstay of her domestic world. Membership of an audience did not simply enhance the gendered identity of women.

The emphasis on the breadwinning role of husbands and fathers, whose main concerns lay in the public world of work, distanced them from their offspring. However, the theatre offered a public space in which men could establish a bond with children. The new fashion in family entertainment made the purchase of theatre tickets a vehicle both for paternal display of a man’s familial achievement and—thus, as Tosh argues—of his full entry into manhood.<sup>62</sup> Wry contemporary commentary is telling:

Click-click go the box-keeper’s keys and *paterfamilias*, his wife and daughters enter in solemn procession to take possession of the seats probably booked for three days. *Materfamilias* is generally stout, and in point of fact takes a chair and a half, which causes her eldest daughter to encroach upon her sister’s share. . . . the row being completed by the head of the family who, be it remarked, is as much distinguished by body as well, that gentleman thus putting himself in a position to defend his party from all possible or impossible assailants.<sup>63</sup>

Taking the argument proposed by Eric Trudgill it is clearly evident that Victorian men found an escapist sanctuary from their responsibilities through relationships with children:

The child offered ease and repose from the troubles of the day, a realm of trust, affection, playfulness and innocence in which the adult man was king; in the nursery world he faced no insuperable problems, no agonising doubts, rather he

could luxuriate in the absence of adult standards, in his freedom from misgiving or external criticism about his conduct and character, in his power to win admiration by a superior strength and cleverness<sup>64</sup>

Moreover, in attending the theatre, albeit across an auditorium, men were connected with child performers and the many meanings embedded in their stage personas. Judith Walkowitz has argued that, "The inclusion of children appealed to audiences because it fore-grounded issues of childhood and highlighted the role of the child. Mid- to late-Victorian culture articulated a new constellation of feeling and identification with the plight of the child."<sup>65</sup> However, alongside this recognition was a developing commercialization of childhood that fueled the sentimentalization of children. As Mavor put it:

For the Victorians, the charm of buying childhood grew out of an active imagination that envisioned one's early years as a lost utopia; a bower to retreat to, a secret garden that every middle-class person could enter through children's books and other child-centred products. The material culture of Victorian childhood produced souvenirs of a time and place that never was—a true Neverland.<sup>66</sup>

As shown above, performing children were particularly adept at evoking emotion from an audience. They could, as Steedman suggests, enable the watcher "to both recall and to express the past that each individual life contained."<sup>67</sup> This was something that was recognized at the time, "Pantomimes [are] for the youngsters, who home for their holidays, can hope to grow up year by year with the original objects of their infantile delight."<sup>68</sup>

Of nostalgia, Kincaid has said, "you can't go back... but you can borrow an illusion so powerfully valid it at times overwhelms reality."<sup>69</sup> Such was the power of the stage-child over its audience. The theatrical industry displayed children in ways which supported, intensified, and exploited the sentimentalized notion of a universal experience of childhood.<sup>70</sup> Pantomime was a particularly evocative medium with which to induce and indulge nostalgic and sentimental thoughts:

Clown, to *pater* and *materfamilias*, and others, was a source of genuine enjoyment; and though they may have passed the sere and yellow leaf of age, the laughs and hearty merriment of their grandchildren, gathered around them, made them think of other days, when they were young themselves.<sup>71</sup>

Catherine Robson suggests, though, that this engagement with one's personal history was not undifferentiated. In particular, because men's childhood was feminized, in revisiting it, men would focus on girl children thus, "watching" was frequently gendered.<sup>72</sup> The Victorian theatre, more than any other public space, offered men the opportunity to gaze at girls. The theatrical child labor force was overwhelmingly female. "While the name of the little actress is legion, the boy-actor is quite a *rara avis*."<sup>73</sup> Roles for boys were usually played by girls and boy characters were often feminized, the most obvious example of this being Lord Fauntleroy.<sup>74</sup>

Likewise, in their roles as animals, imps, and fairies, child performers were able to satisfy a particular need within a Victorian audience. Only a child could convincingly represent the tiny inhabitants of theatrical fairyland. Fairy themes were a particular favorite with the Victorians. Fairies abounded in paintings, literature, and in dramatic productions. Jeremy Maas has explained this fascination:

Fairy painting was close to the centre of the Victorian subconscious. No other type of painting concentrates so many of the opposing elements of the Victorian psyche: the desire to escape the drear hardships of daily existence; the stirrings of new attitudes towards sex, stifled by religious dogma; a passion for the unseen; the birth of psychoanalysis; the latent revulsion against the exactitude of the new invention of photography.<sup>75</sup>

Various explanations have been offered for the Victorian penchant for fairy themes.<sup>76</sup> Nicola Brown argues that "the fairy was a constant presence in Victorian culture because it provided a relief from and a consolation for the Victorians' overwhelming consciousness of the modernity of their world...dreaming of fairies allowed them imaginatively to escape from their world while at the same time picturing it in a magical form."<sup>77</sup>

The allure of the stage-fairy for its audience was decidedly palpable. Entrepreneurs from the entertainment world seized this potential draw. One manager made this clear during a meeting with his peers. "The little fairies and goblins aforesaid, are as essential to certain forms of dramatic art as ever cherubim's were to the canvas of an old master, or as all types of child-life are to the modern painter."<sup>78</sup> The popularity of fantasy and fairyland cannot be denied and whereas illustrations, paintings, and stories might fire the imagination, theatrical representations could seem to bring fairyland to life. Spectators were actively encouraged to

suspend their disbelief and accept the existence of fairyland while in the theatre. This was something late Victorians were more than willing to do. "Haunted also by the fear that industrialism was eroding ancient traditions, citizens took up fairy and more particularly folktales as symbols of both childhood innocence and English culture."<sup>79</sup> Child performers contributed greatly to the audience's ability to suspend disbelief in order to achieve these aims. The stage-child characterized fairies in a way that could never be convincingly replicated by an adult performer in the same role. Tiny children were suitably attired to represent the inhabitants of wonderland and they tip-toed around the elaborately dressed stage that had been transformed into a magical setting. Increasingly sophisticated technology enabled characters to miraculously appear or disappear on cue. Similarly, by the wonders of mechanical invention, audiences witnessed for themselves stage-fairies dressed in wisps of gossamer, flying high across the stage.<sup>80</sup> Nothing could be further from the audience's understanding of work than nymph-like creatures. Nicola Brown emphasises the idea of a fairy as:

The being who never works and whose time is spent in idle play. If they are thought of as "lively elves", the child labourers can be no more than playing, their tasks thus rendered effortless and pleasurable—just as if they were tumbling in and out of flowers, or flying from bower to bower on their gossamer wings.<sup>81</sup>

This understanding of fairy pursuits as the very antithesis of work further distanced the audience from the reality of the stage-child as laborer. Moreover, in fantasizing children in these ways, the child addressed a range of needs within the audience. Taking account of Carol Mavors' findings, not all of these were necessarily ingenuous:

As "pure little girl" she was supposedly not sexual. Yet, given the work of Freud and Foucault the "cult of the little girl," the artistic treatments of her image, the uneasy law of the period, and so forth, we cannot read her as anything but sexual.<sup>82</sup>

This is perhaps an oversimplification. Clearly, Victorian adults valued children in different ways and for a variety of reasons. Nevertheless, sexualized constructions of the Victorian child do have currency and are significant in terms of the relationship between performers and audiences. While child performers helped reinforce the wonderment of this mythical world

for their audiences, certain spectators were drawn to fairy representations for quite different reasons. As shown through contemporary comment, there was a voyeuristic element attached to fairyland. This is perhaps best explained by Schindler's thoughts on the techniques used by the artists of various fairy-themed paintings:

Fitzgerald's fairies dressed in elaborate finery, possess a child-like bemusement as they move with tremulous bravado through a lush exotic floral world. Simmons, Heatherley, and Grimshaw present a more forthright eroticism in their depiction of the sylvan creatures. Their paintings usually focus on a single nude female figure, framed by a natural setting and occasionally surrounded by a fairy court. In some of these works, the inclusion of a toadstool adds a phallic detail to the erotic subtext. These works have a dreamy cast to them as the fairies go about their business, unmindful of their human observers.<sup>83</sup>

The erotic interpretation that Schindler attributed to the canvas was by some artists, transposed onto the all-child fairy ballets that were a regular feature of Victorian theatre:

[A] Brutal person in the stalls had the audacity to admit that since the passing of the Criminal Law Amendment Act [which raised the age of consent for girls from thirteen to sixteen], he had ceased to take any pleasure in the children's ballets.<sup>84</sup>

Clearly, the industry was aware of this allure, and this was something choreographers were not afraid to exploit. A description of one spectator indicates how this translated to some audience members. "Julian gave himself to the illusion created by the skill of Katti Lanner, ignoring entirely the real care of the dancers, and choosing to consider them as merely driven by wild impulse, vagrant desires of furious motion, and the dashing gaiety of keen sensual sensation."<sup>85</sup>

In keeping with this, Tracy Davis has observed that "there existed a recognised encoding borrowed from and supported by the contemporaneous language of sexuality."<sup>86</sup> Meanings, she argues, "do not reside in images... they are circulated between representation, spectator, and social formation."<sup>87</sup> Those patrons possessing the knowledge and understanding of underlying sexual allusion could read quite different interpretations into a seemingly conventional performance. The Victorian theatrical industry provided a voyeuristic opportunity to view children erotically. As far back as the late 1860s, theatre managers had

“discovered that the size of their audiences was often in inverse relationship to the length of their dancers’ skirts.”<sup>88</sup>

Sexual connotations were used to sell performances. One clear example resides in an advertisement for a Glasgow pantomime:

Do not forget the *Coliseum*. You will find there the display of a pantomime and the excitement of a Panorama. There is also music and “The Masher” may do worse than take his “sisters and his cousins and his aunts” into *Walter Wilson’s Wondrous World of Witchery*. They will be pleased and so will *he be* if he keeps his eyes on the *Hebes!*<sup>89</sup>

On the one hand, audiences were presented with a sweet, pure, innocent, and vulnerable child, yet on the other, the child performer was sometimes accused of possessing a “knowingness” about her.<sup>90</sup> Performing children were taught to accompany every word by studied gesture and were made to practice the various expressions of passion, pride, contempt, love, hatred, and pleasure, until each one could be assumed at command.<sup>91</sup> It was common for stage-children to be described as being emotionally older than their years and this left them vulnerable to inappropriate attention. Michael Booth observes that sexual harassment and exploitation were apparently more of a danger for the poorly paid, struggling working-class actress, dancer, or chorister than for the middle-class recruit attempting utility roles as the first step on the ladder.<sup>92</sup>

For the most part, because of their age and the ways in which they were depicted, children were less likely to be associated with the lowness of the profession. Indeed, the very presence of large numbers of children in the theatre and in particular, the increasing significance of middle-class child performers served to raise the status of the profession and over time, the respectability attached to children was disseminated as they entered the adult sectors of the theatre. Nina Auerbach suggests that to her audience the child was always present in Ellen Terry’s performance, even in adulthood. “This theatrical lust of innocence, bestowed on Ellen Terry, a childhood brimming with knowledge, but in the end audiences yearned to make her a child forever.”<sup>93</sup> Successful child performers could carry their celebrity status and the respect this earned them into their adult careers as well. This association of children with virtue and the innocence of their theatrical involvement could itself, though, add to the vulnerability of child performers. Assumptions of the purity of child performance gave the theatre an aura of respectability that would make it inconceivable, to most

members of the audience, that the children they took such pleasure in might be vulnerable to moral corruption.

Louise Jackson suggests, "Reformers were concerned with the developmental impact of [children] entering the adult world too soon [and] of gaining premature knowledge that might lead to moral corruption."<sup>94</sup> Stage-children were well placed for untimely introduction into the adult world and perhaps more vulnerable than most. To some of those campaigning against the presence of children on stage, child performers were viewed as having prematurely lost their innocence because of their association with the theatrical world. Away from their stage performance, child entertainers were at times placed in potentially vulnerable situations. Children spent much time back stage with large numbers of adults, and concerns were also expressed over the intentions of visitors to the green room and those who loitered at the stage door. For certain sections of the audience, regardless of however innocently the child was presented, its performance held sexual connotations.

Given the supposed "knowingness" and "gestures" demonstrated by the performing child, sexual interest in child performers cannot be discounted. The likelihood of theatrical children being sexualized by some sections of the Victorian audience is borne out by Ellen Barlee's when she commented that "the calling of a ballet girl is in itself a recognised lure to the depraved of the other sex, until the poor creatures like birds in the net of the fowler, and few escape the meshes laid to ensnare them."<sup>95</sup>

Manufactured performances by children could disguise and legitimize what might have been seen as taboo in the adult world. This was especially true of all-child companies, where children often portrayed adult roles. Davis has suggested that even if some playgoers sensed improprieties, they were "unable to articulate precisely what and why conventions were improper."<sup>96</sup> The socially constructed "idealized childhood" was steeped in images of purity and innocence. However, James Kincaid maintains, "Purity was in any case, defined by and thus riddled through with sexual desire in Victorian England."<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, he argues, "The special historical construction of 'the child' during this period and slightly before made it available to desire in a way not previously possible."<sup>98</sup> No child was more openly accessible to public desire than the child performer. Watching the stage-child from the anonymity of the audience in a darkened auditorium, the Victorian observer was well placed to project escapist sexual fantasies upon the unwitting child performer.

As depicted in the earlier paragraphs, cultured representations of childhood offered in photographic images helped to shape the sentimentalized

child. However, contradictorily photography was also used to construct a sexualized identity for Victorian children. As Auerbach put it, "The Victorian boom in child pornography and child prostitution suggests that official horrors were underground passions."<sup>99</sup> This notion had particular connotations for children working in the theatre. Holland has argued that:

In the nineteenth century, a new rationalism, which set out to record and improve children's objective conditions, and a romantic notion of childhood as a holy state, undistorted by contact with adult sexuality or commerce, were a stimulus to the photographic industry.<sup>100</sup>

For stage-children however, commerce and, frequently adult sexuality, lay at the heart of the product they were paid to produce. Thus, in delivering imagery of romanticized childhood, their own innocence and quality of life was compromised.

When the theatrical season drew to a close with a loss of the child's income in prospect, young performers were hired out to photographers. Actress and popular photographic model Gladys Cooper recalled that from the age of six she regularly visited Downey's photographic studio. "He would ask my mother as a great favour, to let him try different studies of me, and as she was always presented with some of the copies, she raised no objections."<sup>101</sup> Commercialization of childhood created an increased demand for child photography. Margaret Harker recalls one photographer's studio where "a whole wall of the gallery in his Tunbridge Wells studio was devoted to his child portraits."<sup>102</sup> This is not surprising, considering that child images were used to sell all manner of consumer goods that were aimed at every market. Increased demand created employment opportunities for theatrical children which supplemented their theatrical earnings. Childhood photography did not, though, consist solely of the "chocolate box" image. Ellen Barlee voiced her concern over children being employed by photographers to "pose nude in classical groups or subjects."<sup>103</sup> This practice was commonplace. Eric Trudgill has shown that "from the 1870s to the turn of the century there existed a fashion for representing nude little girls in pictures and photographs."<sup>104</sup> Of this Kincaid argues "The incessant nineteenth-century (and modern) child photographing seems to be a form of the erotic urge and the photographing can, in turn be related to the close connections between paedophilia and voyeurism."<sup>105</sup>

Perhaps the most well-known individual to indulge in this fashion during the late nineteenth century was the author Lewis Carroll.<sup>106</sup> Carroll is of particular interest to this study because of his liking for

and relationships with child actresses and his use of these children as photographic models. Carroll's photographic pursuits placed the theatrical child/model's own experience of childhood in direct conflict with the widespread ideal of what a childhood should be.<sup>107</sup> "It has been suggested that within the world of postcard collectors the motives of publishers have to be questioned."<sup>108</sup> Given that both the photographic and theatrical industries shared the same workforce of child labor and were both exploiting images of children and childhood for economic gain, it is plausible to suggest that the motives of some theatrical managers were also not beyond question. Moreover, photographs were used to sell theatrical productions and "many provincial photographers operated from studios within easy walking distance of theatres and some within theatres themselves."<sup>109</sup> One report shows the potential vulnerability of child performers. This concerned the case of an 11-year-old actress who, with a friend and dressed in their pantomime costumes, visited a studio to have publicity photographs taken. Under false pretences, the photographer arranged for the girl to visit him again but this time alone. On the second visit, she was sexually assaulted by the photographer. Her mother was subsequently offered money by the 44-year-old married man to keep quiet about the incident. In this instance the mother could not be bought and the photographer received a six-month prison sentence.<sup>110</sup> Given that this period witnessed the rise of the stage mother and that some of these women were thought to be unscrupulous, the potential for abuse cannot be discounted.

Young female performers were regularly exposed to sexual innuendo within their workplace. Barlee tells how they were forced to bare "the coarse jokes of various male habitués...who discussed her appearance, shape and physique."<sup>111</sup> For young performers, in particular, the body became an instrument of expression and in the backstage theatrical world various states of undress became the norm and for some it was a natural progression to find themselves posing for nude photography.<sup>112</sup> For those youngsters who remained uneasy in such situations, there were ways and means of obtaining their cooperation. Strategies were deliberately adopted to coerce young subjects into compliant posing. One backstage artist made no secret of the methods he adopted. Children of a certain age are, with few exceptions, not difficult to deal with. "You can bribe them by buns and encourage them by caresses. You may tempt them with toys and threaten with impossible punishments."<sup>113</sup> The fact that some employers saw it necessary to resort to such methods demonstrates that there were some aspects of the work that children were uncomfortable with. However,

the fact remains that the pool of available theatrical child labor invariably exceeded its demand. Moreover, many children were re-employed each year. The lure of applause glamour and income held the sway to offset the less-pleasant aspects of the industry and secure for it a compliant workforce. When the general public entered a theatre they became an audience, which in turn, transformed the theatrical child laborer into a performer. The performer–audience relationship ultimately led to the exploitation of the child both on and off the stage.

The relationship between child performer and an audience was complex. The whole nature of the theatrical child's work was transformed by the presence of an audience. "However excellent the cast, splendid the settings and attractive the costumes, self-evidently, none of these are of any consequence if there is no audience to appreciate them."<sup>14</sup> Paying spectators were the defining factor that made this form of child labor distinctive from other child work. The relationship was, however, reciprocal. Audiences thronged the theatre with an enormous expectation of entertainment. It was the job of child entertainers to deliver this. The child performer provided visual, aural, and mental stimulation regardless of the age, class, or gender composition of audiences, watching children evoked emotional responses. The child performer found the reaction of the audience equally emotionally rewarding because a responsive audience left the child feeling important, appreciated, loved, and empowered. The benefits received during a performance vindicated the many hours of backstage labor and potential abuses.

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, performance was increasingly recognized as a profession and associated with "star status." This section of the leisure industry was linked to glamour and excitement, even though for the majority of performers this was more apparent than real. Although audiences saw the most visible aspect of the industry, in fact, their perception of the performing child fell far short of the backstage reality. The public notion of the industry comprised a double-edged sword. On the one hand it allowed theatrical children a degree of social standing, and on the other hand the desire to watch these children perpetuated backstage exploitation of their labor. In the mind of the performing child the audience responded to a performance *en masse*. The children were not fully aware of their own vulnerability as they were paraded in front of the public gaze. Audience response, however, was individualistic with each member attaching his or her own understanding of the child's performance to meet with his or her own instinctive and distinctive needs.

The child performer provided an intangible commodity that was packaged and consumed simultaneously during the performance. Performer and audience shared a particular moment that was exclusive to each performance. This was a transient product that could never be exactly recreated again and the relationship between the two shaped a mutual and inexplicable bond of appreciation and enjoyment that was so strong it left each party longing for a repeat performance.



Figure 3.1 *Pantomime Tastes at Three Periods of Youth*, *The Bystander*, December 23, 1907.

Those concerned about the presence of children in the Victorian theatre recognized the importance of this bond in the perpetuation of the use of child labor. Campaigners argued, "Stop the demand and the supply will soon cease. Stop the managers' supply and their demand for children will die a natural death."<sup>115</sup> They did not, however, understand the significance of audience response in the construction and maintenance of the child performer's identity. This was something that was to prove a stumbling block in both the campaign to take children off the stage and in the successful implementation of subsequent legislation to limit child involvement, as presented in chapter 4.

## 4. Performing Their Duty: Child Savers and the Theatrical Child ∞

A clear consensus emerged during the last quarter of the nineteenth century among employers, child performers, their families, and the wider public, who made up the audience. A belief that employment of theatrical child labor was both desirable and necessary was the uniting factor for these groups. The hunger to be entertained by children was encouraged and fed by the reciprocal relationship between contemporary culture and the theatre. The industry's recognition of the child as a valuable commodity meant that all aspects of Victorian performance incorporated children in some way. Whole new areas of theatrical genres were developed to meet consumer demand and thus maximize profit potential. The key implication of all this was a massive increase in the number and visibility of child employees.

The popularity of young performers informed the majority view but this did not entirely go unchallenged. In the latter decades of the nineteenth century a campaign was initiated that sought to end the employment of children in theatres. This campaign had two distinct phases. The first, which began in 1884, lasted for five years and focused on changing public opinion about the place of children in the theatrical labor market. This worked to ensure that existing legislation would be applied to outlaw the employment of child performers. The second phase sought to have stage-children included in a wider new legislation around child welfare. Both strategies were met by the mobilization of theatrical interests in defense of child employment. It is useful to note that in ensuing debates, all contributors used the theatrical child as a trope to muster support for their respective campaigns. Whatever the rhetoric, the interests of the actual child were usually incidental.

This chapter aims to reinforce the argument that child labor was of crucial importance to the entertainment industry during the late nineteenth century. Every attack on its use was countered by a defensive response against a background of aggressive promotion of theatrical interests. The energy and resources the employers invested in the continued employment of stage-children reflects their worth as a commodity. As with any capitalist enterprise profit was the main objective of theatre owners and at that moment, child labor comprised an input of production that had no substitute. As the embodiment of Victorian childhood, stage-children were valuable in a number of ways to a variety of adults. This, extended to those who called for an end to theatrical child labor.

Historians have paid only limited attention to the situation of child labor on the Victorian stage, but what research has been undertaken focuses attention on the campaign led by the National Vigilance Association (NVA). While this approach is hardly surprising, given the very public nature of the Association's crusade, it also has consequences relative both to the questions asked of the historical evidence and to its subsequent interpretation. There are three main areas of concern with regard to previous approaches to the study of theatrical child labor. Firstly, there has been a tendency to conflate social purist campaigners with others who were actively involved in charitable work with stage-children. Secondly, such approaches take no cognizance of the fact that concern about the welfare of theatrical child workers predated the social purists' campaigns and continued long after the NVA had lost interest. Thirdly, historians have located debates in a struggle between two opposing camps, with the NVA and theatrical interests embroiled in a tug of war over the passive child victim. This approach is crude. Although theatrical employers had much invested in theatrical child labor, they constituted only one sector of a complex group who had vested interests in the continued employment of theatre children. Overall, work to date, although important in highlighting the issue has not fully engaged with the complexities made visible through more in-depth research.

The theatrical missionary Ellen Barlee was described by Kathleen Heasman as one of those evangelical women having a real presence in Victorian voluntarism.<sup>1</sup> Although a renowned social investigator and philanthropist, it is for her writing of religious tracts that she is perhaps best remembered. Her association with child performers came to wider public attention when she penned *Pantomime Waifs; or, a Plea for our city children*, published in 1884.<sup>2</sup> Her survey comprises the most comprehensive primary source available to researchers in this area. Barlee had firsthand experience

of witnessing the working lives of children backstage. Her book gives a rare voice to the children albeit through her own editing. Given its religious perspective its content appears to present a relatively balanced account when tested against a range of additional primary evidence. The book has been quoted in past studies of theatrical children, but its ethos and the intent behind its publication have often been overlooked or misinterpreted. Timing goes some way to explain this confusion. *Pantomime Waifs* was becoming more widely known in 1885, just as the NVA's Preventative and Rescue Subcommittee began to publically voice concern over the employment of theatrical child labor. Consequently, Barlee's investigative account has been cited by academics in conjunction with the social purist campaign.<sup>3</sup> This is understandable because during the second and the most public phase of the campaign there was some overlap of involvement in both camps by high-profile individuals. Lord Shaftesbury, for instance, had links with several parties that showed concern about this group of children.<sup>4</sup> During the latter phase of its campaign the NVA attached its specific demands to a general campaign by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (SPCC). NVA members jumped on the back of SPCC calls for the passing of the Child Cruelty Prevention Bill (CCP). Lord Shaftesbury had written the preface to Barlee's *Pantomime Waifs* and he recommended this reading to SPCC founder, Benjamin Waugh. As a consequence, theatrical children were given a particular place in the proposed CCP Bill. The NVA worked unremittingly to ensure that child performers were included in the ultimate legislation. Thus, Waugh acts as a hinge that unites Barlee, NVA campaigners, and his proposed legislation to protect all children from cruelty.<sup>5</sup> It is plausible to assume that the paths of Barlee and Fawcett might have crossed more directly as they moved within interrelated circles. For instance, Barlee's general philanthropic concerns were shared by a number of women in the Langham Place circle connected with the Social Science Association. As Kathleen McCrone has reported, this group brought together a wide range of reformers, including the Earl of Shaftesbury and Henry and Millicent Garrett Fawcett.<sup>6</sup> Evidence also shows that Fawcett did consult with the founders of the Theatrical Mission of whom Barlee was well acquainted. However, Fawcett's words do not convey any sense of a close working relationship:

Mr. and Mrs. Courthope Todd, devote their whole lives to the services of children and young people employed in theatres. They did not permit me to quote particular cases...but have formed the very strongest opinion as to the bad moral tendency of theatrical work upon children and young girls.<sup>7</sup>

An additional loose connection is evident from a positive review of *Pantomime Waifs* printed in the *Pall Mall Gazette* on February 14, 1885. This was just five months before W. T. Steed's serialization of the "Maiden Tribute of Babylon" that was linked to Fawcett's involvement with the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885. Nevertheless, a closer examination of Barlee's work reveals a clear division between her associations with theatrical missionaries and Fawcett's work with the NVA sub-rescue committee. Distinctions between the two, in terms of interest, motivation, and responses to theatrical child labor are palpable.

Barlee was typical of middle-class women who benefited from the opportunities that arose from involvement in public work around child welfare.

A prolific writer of religious tracts she was, as Helen Rogers put it:

One of the women to take up the call for "sisters of charity", resolving to investigate and publicize the causes and remedies of distress. Like other philanthropists, she believed the "romances" of the poor could be used to cement the "Christian bond of love" between rich and poor, and their life histories formed the basis of her books and journalism.<sup>8</sup>



Figure 4.1 Image of Ellen Barlee, from author's private collection.

Barlee's writing style was undoubtedly sentimental, and *Pantomime Waifs* was just one of a large number of her publications written with the intention of disseminating the harshness of life associated with the poor. She asserted that "tears are oftener shed over the highly-painted scenes of fiction than over the living representatives of misfortune and oppression"<sup>9</sup> This could imply that her writing was prone to exaggeration yet Barlee claimed to minimize what she had observed for fear that her testimony would be considered unbelievable.<sup>10</sup>

Supporting evidence drawn on for this study does suggest that the content of *Pantomime Waifs* was clearly underpinned by firsthand investigation into the lives of those she chose to write about. One of her contemporaries Jessie Boucherette testified that Barlee was "Well acquainted with the suffering which prevails among our female population."<sup>11</sup>

This approach also applied to her investigation into the backstage lives of theatrical children.

In addition to her own wide-ranging experience Barlee was able to draw upon the earlier work of Lord Shaftesbury to which she was allied. This related specifically to the training regimes of child gymnasts and acrobats. Long after the 1879 Dangerous Performances Bill was passed to protect children in circuses from cruelty, the treatment of these young performers continued to be a source of concern and debate.<sup>12</sup> Five years on and the Act was proving to be inadequate and ineffective:

The fact remains patent that the training necessary to supply the large demand for contortionist exhibition still goes on, and must be performed in secret, where probably, in consequence, a greater amount of cruelty is practised even than before, when legally recognised.<sup>13</sup>

While the legislative route was proving ineffectual in its protection of acrobatic children, preliminary interest in the needs of all child performers was evolving in missionary circles to which Barlee was affiliated.<sup>14</sup> Ten years before the NVA's first protestations about the industry's employment of children, theatrical missionaries had identified and begun to address their needs.

## THE THEATRICAL MISSION

A synopsis of the Theatrical Mission is provided by Pearl Fisher:

In 1873 an effort was put forth by Mr. Howke and some Christian ladies to gather the performers at the Crystal Palace pantomime by means of Gospel free

teas. In 1876 Mr. C.E. Todd, then studying for orders, visiting one of these meetings felt led to write a selection of texts . . . to a young actress; and later on he wrote to others. Replies were received from some which showed that the spirit in which the letters were written was appreciated . . . Gradually the work grew, Christian ladies volunteered to write monthly letters and today about 600 ladies are so serving Christ, writing to over 1500 members of the ballet and chorus and upper-class actresses month by month.<sup>15</sup>

In the absence of family and friends, the intention of the letter mission was, “to send a personal letter each month, asking for a reply if any assistance was needed.”<sup>16</sup> Some ten years after its creation Pearl Fisher reported that:

600 ladies write to young women and children each month while gentlemen and married ladies undertake correspondence with the lads who are asking for these friendly notes. The aim is to furnish every chorus and ballet lady, every theatrical and pantomime child, male and female, and even upper class actresses also—should she so desire it— with some friend who will engage to write at least once a month, whether replies are received or not; seeking to help this with earnest and friendly Christian council (sic). Visitation in homes or Hospitals—especially in cases of accident and sickness which are numerous. endured by the little ones who are compelled to perform for their amusement.<sup>17</sup>

Theatrical employers refuted any claims that touring children were in danger and left to their own devices. One of the largest impresarios, Augustus Harris publicly stated that “They [touring children] were sent to such places as Glasgow, under the care of mothers, who looked after so many children each.”<sup>18</sup> There is little evidence to support this. As an unregulated and itinerant labor force, the numbers of children on tour at any given time were indeterminate, and thus this sector of the workforce was rendered particularly vulnerable. As Kathleen Heasman pointed out, touring children “always stood the chance of instant dismissal in a strange town if they were ill or if the show was not a success.”<sup>19</sup> The Letter Mission had access to a nationwide network of theatricals and its centralizing effect placed it in a unique position to identify members of an otherwise obscure workforce of vulnerable young women and children. As such it is difficult to overestimate the value of this project to those individual youngsters who were in need of help. Barlee records how much children and their families were “appreciative” of the service and not simply during times of crisis.<sup>20</sup>

JUNE 17, 1893 THE GRAPHIC 699

THE  
**THEATRICAL MISSION,**  
 Macready House, Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, W.C.  
 (FOUNDED IN 1876 BY COURTHOPE TODD).

MACREADY HOUSE, BUILT 1885, COST £5,600.

This Christian Institute contains SPACIOUS CLUB ROOMS, and BUFFET with Electric Light, GYMNASIUM, and LIBRARY fitted with Electric Light, and Three Floors of Cubicles are provided for young Ladies in the profession.

The Committee require Contributions for the Orphanage, Seaside Holiday Home, & General Work,

WHICH WILL BE GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGED BY  
 The Treasurer: JOSEPH PETERS, ESQ.  
 Bankers: LONDON AND COUNTY, COVENT GARDEN, W.C.




Patrons: H.R.H. PRINCESS CHRISTIAN, H.R.H. PRINCESS MARY ADELAIDE, DUCHESS OF YORK.  
 H.R.H. PRINCESS MARY OF YORK.

OFFHAM ROAD SEASIDE HOLIDAY HOME  
 Patrons: H.R.H. PRINCESS MARY ADELAIDE, DUCHESS OF YORK,  
 H.R.H. PRINCESS MARY OF YORK.

Figure 4.2 The Theatrical Mission, *The Graphic*, June 17, 1893; issue 1229.

The letter mission was expanded to incorporate everyday practical help with the opening of a theatrical mission institute.

The mission relied heavily on charitable donations and fund-raising activities.

Regular contact with stage employees had revealed the particular problems they faced. As issues arose remedies were proposed. To use Davis's words:

The influx of women into the theatre did not cause theatrical charities to be formed, but the two phenomena are related. Following a decade when the number of actresses increased by 90 per cent, crucial issues of housing, protection of girls and young women, and recreational facilities for children, women, and families were tackled by the Theatrical Mission.<sup>21</sup>

The Mission offered theatrical children a warm and safe environment at those times when, their employers left them to the streets and their own devices.<sup>22</sup>

One of the most valuable services the Mission offered was the provision of inexpensive meals. It was a commonly held misnomer that all children were fed at the theatre. Barlee refuted this:

They bring with them such scraps as they can provide themselves with, and eat them in the streets... when they can earn higher wages the coffee houses allure them... and in the company who, recognising their calling, treat them with too ready familiarity.<sup>23</sup>



Figure 4.3 Sketches at the Bazaar for Macready House Theatrical Mission, *The Illustrated London News*, December 10, 1887.

Missionary efforts did much to ease this problem but some five years after the publication of *Pantomime Waifs*, Mary Jeune suggested that provision was still falling short of need.<sup>24</sup> As David Rubinstein has demonstrated, this came in the midst of much wider concern in society for the general health of the nation's children. "In 1889 the first of three surveys carried out for the London School Board showed

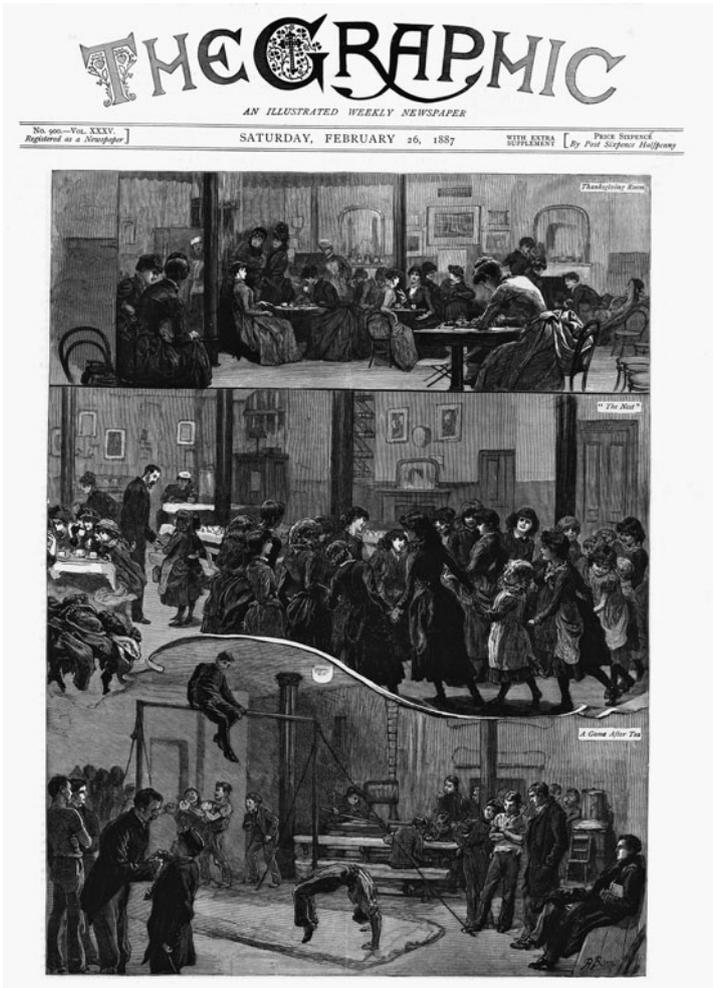


Figure 4.4 The Theatrical Mission, *The Graphic*, February 26, 1887.

that nearly 44,000 undernourished children attended their schools providing statistical reinforcement of claims widely publicised during the Board election of 1888.<sup>25</sup>

Jeune's plan did not detract from the services provided by theatrical missionaries. She did though make an astute point at a time of increasing secularization in an industrialized and urbanized society, when she

acknowledged “the curious mistrust English working people have of any institution founded on a religious basis or attempting to introduce religious teaching in its work.”<sup>26</sup> Jeune planned a more materialist, worldly service:

Some people believe that the children have food... provided for them at the theatre, but this is not so... one has no guarantee that they get enough of the wholesome food that children engaged in such work undoubtedly require. Three or four children club together to get their dinner from some coffee-house near the theatre, but from what I know of these places I do not think them fit for such young children.<sup>27</sup>

Regardless of whether some children were slipping through the missionaries’ net, their provision of creature comforts decidedly surpassed what was being done by theatrical employers. Jeune’s plan calls into question claims made by managers of larger venues about existing provision for young employees. Augustus Harris stated that child performers had their meals at the theatre and were also given time for recreation.<sup>28</sup> This does not seem to have been the case if we consider Jeune’s proposal:

I know from large experience how very cheaply children’s dinners can be provided and I feel sure for a good deal less money than the children give daily, much more harmless and wholesome food might be provided; and if such a plan was carried out I would soon find more volunteer help than they required, and if Mr Harris were to announce that he proposed to carry out such a scheme, and would provide the room. I would undertake to promise that it would never afterwards have to give him a moment’s trouble or anxiety, or cost him a penny. I think if any one considers for a moment that since the children always have to go out for their food, often in wet and showery weather... the risk to their health is very great and with so small an outlay the danger might be obviated, it would not be difficult to carry out my suggestion.<sup>29</sup>

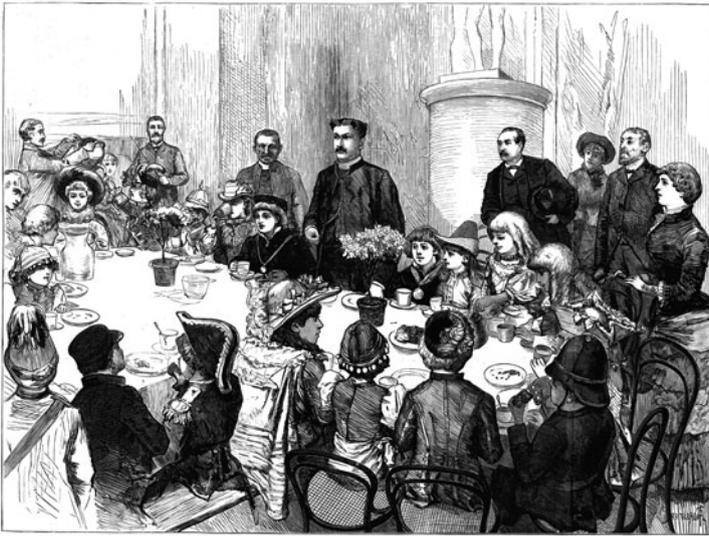
Employers were reluctant to give over valuable backstage space to any voluntary food scheme that might disrupt work on the shop floor. That said, on occasions employers were prepared to make exceptions on this matter when it suited their own needs. This selective provision of food was also hierarchal. Phyllis Bedells’ childhood recollections provide a rare insight in to this:

During the last week of rehearsals for a new production when we had to be in the theatre for long stretches at a time... food was provided in the foyer at the back of the circle for the *corps de ballet* and stage staff, Principals were given excellent meals at the Queens Hotel, next door where a large table was kept laid for any of us who were able to slip out of the theatre for half an hour.<sup>30</sup>

It was usual for some theatre managers or principal performers to hold a tea party backstage for child cast members. However, these were annual events and unlike Barlee's more anonymous work these were much publicized acts of philanthropy.

Jeune's reservations about the religious implications of the Mission's provision may have been excessive and also tenuous. It is important at this juncture to acknowledge the existence of significant forerunners to Jeune's proposed lifeline. The work of William Forbes from London's Graffton Road chapel was an invaluable contribution to this cause. His tea-parties for child performers were a free and weekly occurrence that combined bible instruction with a "sit down tea" of "liberally supplied food" to hundreds of children.<sup>31</sup> Barlee had also set a precedent for Jeune's scheme through her organizing of weekly, backstage tea parties for children.<sup>32</sup> Clearly then, religious-based provision was well established, and taken up by those it targeted.

Positive relations had been developing for some time between church and stage.<sup>33</sup> The mass commercialization and popularity of performance-based leisure prompted a shift in respect for and worship of the clergy. Celebrities and theatres were proving to be a bigger draw than were



**Figure 4.5** Treat to the Children Engaged in the Pantomime at Drury Lane, *The Illustrated London News*, December 17, 1883.

preachers and the pulpit. This was something the church was keen to address and working relationships were forged between the two institutions in the form of the Church and Stage Guild [1879] and later of the Actors Church Union [1899]<sup>34</sup>

The Church and Stage Guild was made up of members from the dramatic profession and the clergy whose aim it was to:

get rid of prejudice against stage and theatre and vice versa, to promote religious and social sympathy between members of the Guild and others and to assert and vindicate the right of religious people to take part in theatrical amusements, whether as performers or spectators.<sup>35</sup>

Only one year on from the formation of the Stage Guild it was claimed that “society is at last opening its charmed doors, clergymen and actors are shaking hands.”<sup>36</sup> By 1897 integration and assimilation of both camps was being hailed as triumphant. “Actors have become clergymen, and clergymen actors.”<sup>37</sup> Alliance with the Church was useful to the theatrical industry as it reinforced the tag of respectability it had worked hard to acquire.<sup>38</sup>

More forceful detractors refused to acknowledge the successes of the Mission. One journalist termed its workers as, “these self-constituted theatrical missionaries” and further claimed:

Our plain opinion is that this appearance of seeking the welfare of stage-children is somewhat awkwardly put on to cover a sort of light skirmish against the profession, in its roots body and branches. We will say no more of these exaggerated puritans and their aspirations against the drama.<sup>39</sup>

Such negative claims about the Mission’s hidden agenda are countered by its willingness to help large numbers of those who remained in the industry. As Davis points out:

If the Mission’s purpose was to denounce the theatre and dissuade people from the stage it was hugely unsuccessful for theatrical workers and their families used the facilities and returned to their work places by the thousands. In 1890, attendance was 18,000, with twice that number visiting during the Christmas season. Library loans rose to 5,000 annually.<sup>40</sup>

It would be a mistake to think about theatrical missionaries as purely preachers. They had early realized that sermonizing was not the most conducive strategy and they always took a cross-denominational approach:

The authorities regarded it almost as a matter of honour not to undertake any proselytising. Their first object is to get the trust and confidence of the girls,

and then they find the opportunity to drop the right word in at the right season; and being the right word, it is sure to have its due weight whether uttered by Roman Catholic, Dissenter or Methodist.<sup>41</sup>

The increasing numbers of children passing through the Mission doors; 5,500 children were admitted in its first year, is indicative of the challenges faced by children employed to entertain for their living.<sup>42</sup> In the light of apathetic employers and a failure from other bodies to recognize child entertainers as exploited workers, missionary achievements were outstanding given that the commercial provision of performance-based entertainment was vast, varied, and nationwide. The nature of the business produced a widespread, diverse, itinerant workforce with an ever-changing dynamic. This posed problems with regard to collating evidence about or addressing work-related problems for young entertainers. These were the same conditions that also made it difficult to effectively regulate theatrical child labor through legislation. Missionary work lay the foundations for secular provision of similar services in the form of Girls Clubs that came much later.<sup>43</sup>

## ELLEN BARLEE

Ellen Barlee's commitment to performers was especially child focused and practical. Barlee drew on knowledge of theatrical employment that had been amassed by the Theatrical Mission movement and applied this to identifying and addressing the specific needs of performing children. Despite the rhetoric of celebrity and glamour that surrounded the theatrical world, Barlee grasped the realities of the work for its child employees. Typically, she described their life away from the spotlight:

Some poor weary ballet child... All the evening she has been either shivering in her gossamer dress in the green room... or dancing till every limb feels strained with the exertion. Then when her work is over, throwing off her tinsel clothing and donning her ordinary attire she turns her head back on the bright lights of the theatre, and wends her way through the cold, muddy streets... until she reaches her home in some garret. It is almost one o'clock [before she] creeps into bed.<sup>44</sup>

Although Barlee would have preferred children not to have been employed in theatres, her thinking was in line with the doctrine of the Letter Writing Mission. "Christ may be served and glorified in any work provided their

labour is honest and true and they are bid to shape their conduct to his approval and that of their own conscience."<sup>45</sup> Barlee accepted that these children needed to earn and as such she was not particularly intent on persuading them to give up performing.<sup>46</sup> She did, however, encourage them to embrace and adhere to the word of God while working in the profession and hoped, as a consequence of this, they might choose alternative modes of employment.

Moreover, Barlee was adept at packaging her evangelical message in ways that would appeal to theatrical children. For example, she approached the manager of the *Crystal Palace Theatre*; a major employer of young theatricals, to offer her services as religious instructor to his child employees. This was agreed to with one proviso:

That I would promise not to set them against their calling; and thus it came to pass, as narrated, that I found myself the centre of a pantomime tea party . . . I improvised a tale of a little ballet dancer, who, falling from a trapeze had met with an accident, which eventually resulted in her death. During the child's illness, a lady, however, visited her, and carried her, the good news of salvation through Christ, the little one accepting such an offer in all the freshness of her hearts faith. Never was there a more earnest attentive audience; many of the children were moved to tears.<sup>47</sup>

Barlee's experience was rare in being able to witness the backstage persona of the child performer. Although acutely aware of the difficulties that theatrical work placed on children she did recognize that they also had some agency. Very often the children were prime movers in initiating their theatrical careers.<sup>48</sup> According to Barlee "children soon learn [ed] to measure their own abilities and worth, and trade with their talents."<sup>49</sup>

For example, when one manager lowered the wage rate of 60 boys who he employed to simulate ocean waves, the boys took a united stand:

They took their places under the canvas sea and when the prompter gave the signal for the storm, the water was stagnant—instead of the ship striking it was the waves that *struck*. . . We won't move a peg unless you pay us a shilling a night, for it wears out our corduroys so.<sup>50</sup>

Waves seemed to be especially prone to industrial action. A large number of boys who represented waves also went on strike during a pantomime production of "Beauty and the Beast" at London's Theatre Royal.<sup>51</sup> These instances support Barlee's claims that child performers did have some

agency. Her knowledge of the children was in direct contrast with that of the NVA that portrayed theatrical children as purely passive victims.

While both the NVA and Barlee shared some of the same concerns about theatrical children, the solutions they sought were manifestly different. Fawcett's supporters aimed to stop the industry from employing children, while Barlee intended to dissuade the children from wanting to work there. Crucially, Barlee worked within the confines of the theatrical world in order to improve the working conditions of its child workers. NVA members sought to work against the industry.

### THE NATIONAL VIGILANCE ASSOCIATION

The NVA's initial interest evolved from its concerns about the perceived immorality of music halls and theatres and the moral welfare of children who worked there. However, as the industry was not given to revealing any of its backstage operations it is unlikely that even theatre-going NVA members would have been familiar with its methods of production. Barlee, on the other hand, having been a regular backstage visitor, at least gained some personal insight into the private face of the industry and the needs of the children within this. The NVA's belief that the eradication of theatrical child labor was the most effective way of resolving morality issues was based in part, on assumption.

The *belief* that the public would respond positively to a campaign that stressed the vulnerability of children was based though, on experience. Widespread support for the Maiden Tribute campaign and its subsequent success not only meant that campaigners were extra vigilant in seeking out vulnerable girls, but also gave them a sense of confidence that the public would support their endeavors. This assuredness encouraged the NVA to call for the abolition of theatrical child employment. In the light of their recent success with the campaign to raise the age of consent, some members perceived stage-children as an obvious weapon with which to attack the industry. In so doing, they believed that Victorian concerns about the vulnerability of children would guarantee success. However, when campaigners identified theatrical children as in need of moral rescue they did not envisage the wall of opposition they would face.

As shown above, theatrical missionaries had been accused of being primarily, theatre-hating moralists who were using children as a means to attack the industry. When the NVA took up the cause against theatrical

child employment, they faced similar accusations. One journalist argued that the object of NVA campaigners was “not to protect children, but to molest managers (those servants of Satan) and, ultimately to strike a blow at the acted drama.”<sup>52</sup> However, unlike Barlee and her fellow Theatrical Missionaries who worked within the confines of the industry to achieve their aims, NVA strategies were in direct conflict with the interests of the industry. Therefore, as will become apparent, theatrical bosses drew on a wider network of influential allies, all of whom had a vested interest in the continued use of theatrical child labor.

### MORAL DANGERS

In contrast to the highly visible activities in front of the footlights, backstage remained a somewhat unknown entity. The secluded environment coupled with concerns highlighted by the Maiden Tribute affair alerted NVA members to the industry’s potential for harboring corrupt influences and practices.<sup>53</sup> Compulsory education had separated the realms of adulthood and childhood. Late Victorian period children were located in the schoolroom that took them from the streets and away from the adult domain of the workplace. NVA campaigners took this ideal to argue that it was unhealthy for stage-children to spend so much time in the company of adults especially within the realms of the theatre. Socialist H. W. Hobart wrote:

If it is bad for the children to play in the streets because of the tendency to learn evil, it will not improve them to have to mix with grown up persons in the Green Room. Children are undoubtedly very precious and constant association with adults under such conditions is calculated to be more harmful than casual intercourse. That they do readily ape the man everyone who has seen them on stage will admit.<sup>54</sup>

The entertainment industry was fiercely protective of the respectable family audience it had long sought and secured, and so was quick to play down anything that might link the theatre with immorality. One theatrical trade journal typically claimed that:

As for moral associations, there is nothing in a well-conducted theatre that could do these youngsters the least harm, as there is nothing that could scandalise the most vigilant of the “vigilance” committee men who were familiar with the methods of theatrical production.<sup>55</sup>

The industry also suggested that the presence of children in the theatrical adult world was in itself a regulator of adult behaviour. “There is one curious thing which may not be known to the Highly particular sect—no manager, actor, or actress would use a profane or coarse word among the children; such an offender would be scouted by the roughest member of any company and condemned by the very stage-carpenters.”<sup>56</sup> This flies in the face of claims from one young dancer who recalled that even one of the most respected theatrical child employers made, “the air thick with his oaths.”<sup>57</sup>

Lewis Carroll did not see this as a problem. He argued that the very nature of childhood was a safeguard against any corruption of young performers:

Ignorance of the ways of the world, and of the meanings of most of the words they hear, is a protection enjoyed by young children, and by them only. The evil itself is undeniably great—though less, I believe, in this age than in any previous one—but it is almost wholly limited to the adult members of the company and of the audience.<sup>58</sup>

Theatrical employers enjoyed wide support from their allies in parliament. Typically, Louis Jennings, Member of Parliament, refuted campaigners’ assertions of immorality:

[They] Imagined that behind the scenes awful orgies were carried on. The fact was that behind the scenes of the theatre was a place of business which was well looked after; and admission behind the scenes of some of their great theatres was almost as difficult to obtain as admission to Buckingham Palace.<sup>59</sup>

The obscurity of backstage life that Jennings claimed served as a safety measure against abuse, could equally though, provide the anonymity that potential abusers required. Those who were invited through the stage door entered at the discretion and moral standards of each individual in a position to allow them through. Ultimately, it was this that governed the degree to which young performers were put at risk or safeguarded from any possible harm and not the venue, production, size or class of theatre. For example, one porter at a Manchester Theatre claimed that “to pass through the iron door which at the Theatre Royal separates the stage from the auditorium is for the ‘unauthorised person’ not less difficult than for a camel to go through a needle’s eye.”<sup>60</sup> Yet, of another theatre, a young actress maintained that “Gentlemen find that a coin will easily pass them through the stage door.”<sup>61</sup> It was claimed that “one Gaiety stage doorkeeper . . . made so

much money in tips for arranging appointments for mashers with the girl of their choice, that he later owned a street of houses.”<sup>62</sup>

Accusations of backstage immorality and its possible effects on children were taken seriously by some. George Shipton from the Education Commission, broached this subject when questioning Millicent Fawcett. “I suppose your committee have found that it is a fact that in nearly every theatre in London the practice is adopted by managers to allow swell people to go on at the back of the stage and talk to the girls during the performance?” Fawcett agreed that “there was no restriction placed by the manager on entrance to the Green Room.” Shipton further enquired whether she had “evidence that girls occasionally complained to the managers that these swell people had interfered with them and talked to them when they had not desired it.”<sup>63</sup> Unlike Barlee, Fawcett had little firsthand knowledge of the experiences of theatrical girls. Unsurprisingly, she could not supply Shipton with specific examples. It is doubtful, given the NVA’s detached approach that its members would accrue the same insights into the industry which the missionaries’ hands-on-methods had established. This is not to infer that there was no cause for complaint; George Shipton offered an example of “girls who have complained and the manager’s reply was that ‘square girls’ did not pay and if they did not like it they could go.”<sup>64</sup> Girls were unlikely to protest given, how highly their dependent relatives valued a theatrical wage. Additionally, as part of an oversubscribed labor force, young girls were aware of their expendability. Additionally, many of these girls worked under legally binding contracts that compelled them to accept and complete engagements that were allotted to them and which prohibited them, over several years, from seeking work independently. Failure to comply could and as evidence shows, did, incur a fine from the courts.<sup>65</sup>

Backstage “visitors” were only one of several issues of moral concern voiced by NVA campaigners over theatrical child labor. The industry was in the business of providing escapist entertainment for its patrons, which required its employees to work unsociable hours. Late finishing times were problematic for all children, even those employed in theatres that might be working to the highest of moral standards. This did not go unacknowledged at the time. “Hundreds of pantomime children go home in the dark and alone. They get into bad company, and the morality of the stage is not proof against the immorality of the streets.”<sup>66</sup> Yet, it was the *demands* of the industry which placed the children in the predicament in the first place.

High profile producer Oscar Barrett claimed to have provided “safe and sufficient transit for the children to and from their homes.”<sup>67</sup> On the other hand Annette Bear’s eye witness account of Barrett’s, homeward-bound employees contradicts his version. Bear told of several children she encountered on a late night train:

None of them had anyone to meet them at The Palace... One seven year old had to catch a third train alone. Nobody ever came to fetch her and she was frightened of going through the streets alone. “I suppose then,” I said, “you run all the way.” “No I don’t” she replied, “I am too tired, my legs ache.” Her head dropped and she fell asleep.<sup>68</sup>

Similarly, Millicent Fawcett recounted the tale of one child “who was engaged at the Crystal Palace ballet... and used to come home at night by herself and had to walk from Ludgate Hill Station... She was attacked twice in the street, and was exceedingly frightened and alarmed.”<sup>69</sup> Children left the theatre wearing their own clothes but often they remained in full stage makeup. Rouged cheeks and red lips drew attention to an already vulnerable group of children and highlighted the celebrity status that made them public property.

Once the children left the security of their stage personas behind, the emotional reward they so craved could bring unwelcome interest, especially when the child was clearly still performing. One observer witnessed a 12-year-old actress on the rail platform after a late night show who was singing, “I’m out on the spree.” When asked how she was to get home she told how she, “hoped a gentleman might take her.”<sup>70</sup> Regardless of whether or not they sought this attention, clearly, being left to travel home at such late an hour posed problems particular to this form of child labor. Those who supported the industry though, dismissed this sort of criticism and typically countered that if children were not “playing in the pantomime, many of the children would be spending their lives in squalid garrets and gutters.”<sup>71</sup> “Do you imagine they would be put to bed at seven if they had not to go to the theatre?”<sup>72</sup> Whatever the truth of this is, it is clear that the commodity value managers put on the children as workers had no currency beyond the stage door. This emphasizes the importance of the services offered by the theatrical missionaries to theatrical children; both supporting them within the profession and in encouraging them to pursue alternative employment.

Although campaigners claimed that theatrical child employment “unfits them for work in any other station in life,”<sup>73</sup> theatrical missionaries

disagreed with this thinking and recognized that skills associated with performance were both valuable and transferable:

Not a few, comparatively, of these [young theatrical girls] have entered Hospitals, have been thoroughly trained, and are now particularly successful Nurses. It would seem, indeed, that Nursing demands many of the qualities which go to make the successful player, such as sympathy, tact, intelligence, readiness to take cue, and self-repression.<sup>74</sup>

From the outset, however, Fawcett challenged any argument that suggested that theatrical training could prepare children for respectable employment as adults:

I do not deny that in a few cases this may be so; but the children are employed in hundreds, while those of them who can obtain engagements in theatres after they are grown up are counted by tens. The vast majority of these children are, therefore, too often unfitted by theatrical life for the humdrum routine of ordinary industry, without being able to pursue the calling to which their childhood was sacrificed.<sup>75</sup>

Lifelong actress Ellaline Terriss claimed the theatre to be “the greatest reforming influence street children can get [it] gives them friends in stations far above them to help them to higher ideals.”<sup>76</sup> Some supporters maintained that theatrical experience was, in itself, an educator of its child workers.<sup>77</sup> NVA supporter, Sophia Beale found this an unacceptable notion, “as rate payers paid for schools many believed that rate payers should decide where morals are taught.”<sup>78</sup>

Even though the NVA focused its campaign on the moral welfare of theatrical children and despite this being located within the *wider* climate of moral panic, its cause attracted only limited support. This was, in part, due to difficulties in penetrating the industry’s formidable defenses. When the expected tide of moral outrage against the use of child labor in theatres failed to materialize, campaigners were forced to rethink their strategy. The idea that the industry could be undermined by publicizing the situation of stage-children persisted, but the emphasis shifted away from moral concerns to use of existing legislation.

## EDUCATION

The introduction of compulsory education had assisted in the reconstruction of childhood as a period of learning rather than one of labor.<sup>79</sup>

However, the statutes had done nothing to limit the employment of child performers. In part, this was because legal constraints did not fully cover theatrical work. Theatrical methods of production differed from that of general industry; therefore those who drafted the protective legislation earlier in the century could not have predicted the specific needs of theatrical children nor the industry's modes of operation.

Most obviously, perhaps, education laws did not concern the under fives as it was not envisaged that industrial employers would want to employ children so young. Theatre managers regularly and legally employed children who were under school age.<sup>80</sup> Although of little use to other industries, children of tender years proved to be popular with the audience and, therefore, profitable assets in the business of entertainment. Theatrical employers hired children of all ages and claimed that they were exempt from the 1876 Education Act, because it allowed:

Such employment during which school is not open, or otherwise does not interfere with the efficient elementary instruction of such child; and that the child obtains such instruction by regular attendances for full time at a certified school, or in some other efficient manner.<sup>81</sup>

It is understandable that the public might accept this, given that the visible side of theatre employment, the performance, at least appeared to comply with the law. This clause was used by theatrical employers to enable them to employ children, both under and over ten years of age, regardless of their obtaining the required standard of education. Noting this, the NVA argued that if the laws were altered to better accommodate the education of these particular children then they could be freed from moral and other dangers.<sup>82</sup>

If the education campaign was to surpass the limited achievements attained by its moral crusade the organization had to demonstrate how the legislative umbrella, designed to cover all children, failed to protect those working in theatres. In order to show the effect this had on theatrical children the NVA embarked on, what Fawcett described as:

A careful and systematic inquiry from the teachers of Board Schools and other public elementary schools, and from School Board officers, as to their opinion about the effect theatrical employment had on the health, education and moral character of the children.<sup>83</sup>

As Fawcett observed, testimonies from head teachers revealed that demands made by the industry on theatrical children severely affected their education:

[Theatre children] seem very tired in coming to school, and I have never exacted the same amount of work from them as I did from the other... a child of twelve, who acts every night in "Harbour Lights"... comes regularly to school, but is "fit for nothing from fatigue."... [Teachers] cannot speak strongly enough of the mischief to the children, mental, moral and physical, resulting from their early engagement in theatres and pantomimes... "There is no doubt their health suffers"... "I think decidedly their health suffers; the late hours and extra strain are far too much"... in fact no teacher whom we have consulted has answered differently.<sup>84</sup>

Campaigners claimed that the demands of theatre work left children too fatigued to receive an education and that schoolroom activities were seen as dull and unprofitable to children accustomed to the glamour and money offered to them by the industry. This coupled with widespread truancy among theatrical children led the NVA to conclude that the theatrical industry all but ended a child's education.<sup>85</sup>

One explanation of how the continued absenteeism of so many children went largely unquestioned was that the demand for child performers was highly gendered. This was advantageous to theatrical employers in a number of ways. Although boys were hired to appear on stage, especially in battle and fighting scenes, where it was possible girls were used. The preference for girl performers extended to the practice of dressing them as boys and using them to play male roles. Several reasons were given for this practice. For example, the *Pall Mall Gazette* reported:

Girls are most in demand, for they are most amenable to rules and regulations and are most easily managed. They are quicker in picking up the business, and they are not nearly so troublesome or noisy... No discipline seems to keep a boy in order. He is more plague than profit, and therefore the gentler, quicker and less boisterous representative of the softer sex is far preferable.<sup>86</sup>

Another report stated that "the drilling of the youths and maidens who contribute so largely to the fun and grace of the spectacles... the process is one that requires patience and painstaking, especially with the masculine recruits, girls always learning everything much more quickly than the stupider sex."<sup>87</sup>

One more aspect, unlikely to be publicly expressed, was that employment of girls was less likely to come under official scrutiny, thus making it easier for the industry to employ children outside the confines of the law. Anna Davin has observed that in Victorian schools there was a general acceptance of female absentees and notes that there was:

A double standard in schools for boys and girls which undermined the formal equality of educational provision. In Board Schools the lower attendance rate for girls if noted at all was attributed to home cares with no suggestion of how to improve it. Visitors were sent out to search for truant boys yet the absence of a girl was not viewed as truancy and their homes were not searched in the same way. Their relative immunity sprang from the notion that they were necessarily required at home more than boys. A mother's domestic overload invariably fell on the shoulders of her daughter. The usefulness of school was perceived as different for girls than boys by those concerned with the provision of elementary education whether at the level of the individual or of social or national interest. Boys were to be workers and citizens; girls' intended future was domestic.<sup>88</sup>

The issue of education provides a clear distinction between the expectations of Barlee and Fawcett with regard to the needs of child performers. Fawcett claimed that "endless excuses are invented to explain the absence of a child from school because the parent is ashamed to say 'Lottie is going to the theatre, and I am living on her wages.' A favourite invention in these cases is to say that the child is suffering from scarlet fever or some other infectious disease; this has the double advantage of frightening away the teacher and School Board officer, from visiting the missing child."<sup>89</sup>

Barlee was much less concerned than was Fawcett about how employment in the entertainment industry restricted a child's education. She firmly believed that public money spent on teaching academic subjects to schoolgirls was wasted. For her, a girl's destiny lay almost certainly in household employment:

Care should, I think, be taken not to instill too much independence of action into a being whose sphere in life is defined as one of subjection, obedience and ductility and whose position from the cradle to the grave, as daughter, wife or servant, subjects her to the will of another... A forced cultivation of intellect gives them a taste and yearning for books and mental pleasures, which invariably engenders distaste for work, the practical handwork, I mean, that falls to a servant's lot.<sup>90</sup>

She argued that industriousness could bring fulfilment. She cited her own housemaid to support her claim. She never bothered herself with reading

books anymore, “You see I have not time for it now, but then I was born to be a housemaid, and I won’t let anybody beat me at that.”<sup>91</sup> Barlee remained steadfast in this view. Her preferences for domestic work over and above theatrical employment for girls is evident in her recollection of one five-year old child who had thanked her in later life for being “redeemed from the stage [and] . . . placed in an orphanage to be trained as a servant.”<sup>92</sup> Barlee and her fellow missionaries did not turn their backs on children who worked as entertainers but it is clear that they saw it as a personal triumph if they successfully recruited them into alternative occupations. This attitude and approach was challenged in an Australian newspaper that published a scathing review of Barlee’s *Pantomime Waifs*:

Then for sums paid for proficiency in this art are “incredulous”; whereas the earnings of the black-lead packer are “infinitesimal.” But a poor little child who was a demon, and had to yell out loud (what character could a child assume with more pleasure?) came under Christian influence and now receives two-pence-halfpenny a gross for wrapping black-lead in paper parcels. This child was, according to description, a very good and jolly child who aided a sick mother. How she can help her poor mother now on a miserable fee, which scarcely supports life, we do not understand.<sup>93</sup>

It is not clear if Barlee’s motives for steering young girls toward domestic service were purely altruistic. Her brother Sir Frederick Palgrave Barlee, was the Western Australia Colonial Secretary who was involved in the administration of British immigration to that country.<sup>94</sup> In 1885 he noted Australia’s great need for general servants who could also cook. This was a need that Ellen Barlee and her sister Louisa sought to fulfil.<sup>95</sup> As “female emigration agents in London,” the pair actively recruited young females to go to Australia.<sup>96</sup> Barlee had access to a ready market for British domestic workers abroad and funding for the passage of young performers, through an emigration fund held by the Theatrical Mission.<sup>97</sup> In the year following the publication of *Pantomime Waifs*, Barlee wrote to the Western Australia legislature recommending the setting up of a home to train girls as domestic servants.<sup>98</sup> This connection adds an important and previously ignored dimension to any analysis of Barlee’s relationship with her “pantomime waifs.”

Barlee’s close association with theatrical children informed her recognition of the economic imperatives that tied them to the stage. Barlee’s aspirations for stage-children, coincided with her work as a procurer of girls and young women to furnish the Australian labor market. However, she clearly failed to understand that a key advantage to female child performers

was the potential the work gave to escape from the inevitability of servitude within their own families or as paid employees. It is possible only to speculate about whether it was her beliefs regarding what was best for the children themselves or for her emigration agency, that most informed her insistence that neither the stage nor formal academic education, were useful preparation for respectable womanhood. More importantly, her views could not but have shaped her interpretation of child labor. This raises questions about her impartiality as a personally disinterested spokeswoman for stage-children.

In direct contrast to Barlee and her supporters, the NVA sought to use educational legislation to circumscribe the power of theatrical managers by trying to make them accountable in the same way as other employers. The industry was quick to respond. A common counter argument was echoed in the press:

We do not under-rate the value of education to the masses; on the contrary, we hold it vital to the interests of modern civilisation. But once a year the educational tendencies of the theatre may safely be allowed to act co jointly with or entirely take the place of those of the school room.<sup>99</sup>

This argument supports a common fallacy that theatrical employment was too short-lived to harm a child's education. However, the dismissal of theatrical child employment as a once a year activity is disingenuous. To theatrical employers children were primarily a source of profit and any "professor of theatrical dancing, [undertook] to get engagements for the child...as frequently and as continuously as possible."<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, even those children actually employed once a year in pantomime were rehearsed for six weeks before being engaged for up to three months of the theatre season. Any defense that failed to take account of this provides further evidence that the educational needs of stage-children were secondary to those of the industry.<sup>101</sup>

Employers were adept at understating how often and how many children were employed and for how long their engagements lasted. A number of factors, relative to the Education Acts, allowed them to manipulate their use of child labor. Firstly, it was claimed that performances took place out of school hours. This was not strictly true because during the late 1880s the industry had introduced matinees that took place in schooltime.<sup>102</sup> Secondly, children were employed in their largest numbers during the pantomime season, and this was a time that managers claimed exemption for, because pantomimes were produced during the school holidays. NVA

scrutiny of theatrical practices showed that managers were reluctant to reveal the mandatory six-week rehearsal period that operated within school hours. Thirdly, for touring children schooling was not a viable option, especially with regards to the grueling schedule of “all child companies” who on non-performance days were traveling to their next venue. NVA publicity did much to highlight the hard physical nature of the work and the late nights that rendered children too tired to attend their classes but this was countered by mass publicity that widely associated the child’s contribution as an extension of his or her playtime. Consequently, participation did not appear to contravene the law that allowed light casual work after school. This not only enabled theatrical child employment to continue but also fueled its demand.

It must be appreciated that during a two-year period (1885–87) of NVA investigation and promotion of its findings, the most apparent change in circumstances, for theatre children, was an *increased demand* for their labor. Consequently, the NVA looked to the London School Board for support in its efforts to challenge the industry:

The School Board for London introduced a deputation from the NVA . . . urging upon the Board the importance of enforcing the provisions of the Education Act of 1876, so as to prevent the employment at pantomimes . . . of children under 10 years of age . . . [The NVA] felt that the time had come to draw the attention of the Board to the question of the moral and physical peril involved in the life of pantomime children. They had reason to believe that the danger to health, education and morals to children engaged in factory work was as nothing compared with that involved in the work of the pantomime. They alleged that the late hours, the polluted atmosphere, the sudden changes of temperature and clothing, the long periods without food frequently suffered by the children, the weary walk home at the coldest of the night cause frequent illnesses, resulting in many cases in consumption and rheumatic fever, and even in premature death. Sometimes, parents thought it worthwhile to withdraw their children altogether from the Board Schools and enter their names and pay a higher fee at some venture private school, where attendance was not enforced, and where it was easier to conceal or escape the penalties on nonattendance.<sup>103</sup>

Although furnished with this information, the Board made no active attempt at a practical solution. About six months later NVA members organized a meeting designed to strengthen their movement. It was here that Mrs. Ormiston Chant claimed that there were known to be 10,000 children employed in connection with pantomimes throughout the country.<sup>104</sup>

At the gathering, members proposed to outlaw employment in theatres of young children by reference to the 1870 Education Act that forbade the employment of children under ten, London School Board member, Miss Davenport-Hill, vowed to persuade her fellow Board members to “put that clause into operation.”<sup>105</sup>

In 1885, Fawcett had asked her readers to “urge on representatives in Parliament and on the School Board, the necessity for the absolute prohibition of the labour of children in theatres, just as their labour is now forbidden in factories, workshops and agriculture.”<sup>106</sup> Clearly, the Board elected in that year was reluctant to take action against theatrical employers and by the end of their term in late 1888; they had failed to act, at the end of 1888 Fawcett appealed to the new School Board to be much more zealous than the old one in the exercise of its powers; and besides that, we want, in the words of the Royal Commissioners on Education “the State to step in between these children who are employed in theatres and those parents whose cupidity seeks to make a profit out of their employment.”<sup>107</sup> The findings of the Education Commission were published at that time and although Fawcett had contributed evidence to the enquiry, theatre children formed only a small part of a larger, general investigation into the education of all children.<sup>108</sup> The growing public focus on the welfare and education of all children put pressure from the electorate for the Board to execute its powers. Timing of NVA demands about child performers was perhaps more influential than the demands made. Within one week of Davenport-Hill attending the NVA meeting, the London School Board had sent out the following letter to each theatrical manager:

The attention of the By-Laws Committee of the School Board for London has been drawn to the neglect of the provisions of the law respecting the employment of children. I am accordingly directed to send you a summary of the law relating to the attendance at school of children between the ages of five and 14, and to the employment of such children. I am to state that it will be necessary for the School Board of London as the local authority, to enforce the law in the cases of all children within the metropolitan area who are illegally employed, the expense of their general well-being whether in theatres or other ways, and I am directed to send this timely intimation to managers of theatres to prevent inconvenience in their business arrangements.<sup>109</sup>

Employers however, paid little heed to this warning; nor did it seem that they needed too. Despite intensified pressure from NVA members for the School Board to act in accordance with the letter, it was a further 18 months before they moved toward enforcement. The Board’s prolonged

inaction caused some skepticism among campaigners. Concern was voiced over both the Board's commitment to the cause and with whom their sympathies lay:

Under the Factory Act, prosecutions can be undertaken by any one of the public and the power is not abused. . . I only know that, as a matter of fact, children have largely been employed in theatres during the past winter, as well as in previous years, in contravention of the law, and that no prosecution has taken place, though we have endeavoured, as far as possible, to bring the facts before the Board.<sup>110</sup>

This incredulity is understandable given the National Union of Teachers' findings from its later enquiry into school attendance and child employment:

The School Attendance Committees are too often composed of persons who have little sympathy with education, and some of whom themselves employ children illegally during the busy seasons. . . Sometimes they are directly hostile to education, and often their popularity is at risk with their humble neighbours. The very men whose interest it is to employ children without authorisation have been frequently the persons appointed to the membership of School Attendance Committees and Boards.<sup>111</sup>

Clearly, this double standard was a long-standing practice. When public debate around the unlawful employment of theatrical children was at its height, it was reported that a member of the "Westham (Sussex) School Board was charged with employing factory children disqualified from employment by reason of not having passed the required standard of education"<sup>112</sup> What is perhaps less well known is that "bankruptcy and felony [were] the only two reasons for which a member of a School Board may be declared unseated."<sup>113</sup> Consequently, the individual was able to retain his place on the School Board; a decision which all but sanctioned the illegal use of child labor at the expense of children's education. The reluctance of School Boards to exercise their powers was not always based on self-interest. There were additional mitigating circumstances that hindered the execution of duties. For example, one inspector claimed that:

It may, however, safely be said that in most cases the attendance officers have too large a district and are too badly paid to secure a thorough investigation of all the cases brought to their notice. . . while it is practically understood in some parts of the district that two absences weekly will be allowed without inquiry as to the cause, and so these absences become the rule.<sup>114</sup>

However the NVA's continued badgering of the London School Board did bring to an end the years of apathy demonstrated by previous boards. In 1889, the London Board embarked on a series of prosecutions against theatrical employers.

It was itself an achievement in having these cases heard in court. However, even this feat fell short of NVA expectations because of the reluctance of magistrates to convict.<sup>115</sup> The magistrate presiding over one prominent case said that he would be:

Sorry to see any impediment thrown in the way of children obtaining something to enable their parents to maintain them, if such an arrangement could be made without interfering too much with their education . . . the law did not require children to be taught at a Board school, therefore, if children were employed, and in the meantime their education was efficient, that was all the law required.<sup>116</sup>

Managers claimed exemption under Section 9 of the 1879 Education Act, "That such employment during which the school is not open, or otherwise does not interfere with the efficient elementary instruction of the child; and that the child obtains such instruction by regular attendances for full time at a certified efficient school, or in some other efficient manner."<sup>117</sup> On occasions when a magistrate recognized that the demands of theatre work were likely to affect a child's right to an education, the punishments meted out *were* hardly a deterrent.

Even when convicted, the open defiance shown by employers provides clear evidence of the profitability of children as entertainers. The London Board charged Manager William Morton with illegally employing three children under the age of ten years. In addition to their six evening performances, the children appeared twice weekly during school hours. Morton had defied an earlier warning notice and had even displayed the document outside his theatre with an added note stating he intended to continue to employ the children. This public flouting of the law could well have been a maneuver to gain the support of theatregoers against those attempting to spoil their pleasure. Morton questioned whether employment for two afternoons a week over such a short period was really employment within the meaning of the Act.<sup>118</sup> In an attempt to exonerate himself from blame he maintained that the parents had claimed their children to be over ten years of age. Morton was fined a total of £1.1s including costs.<sup>119</sup> His claim that he would never employ children in the future as they caused far too much trouble seemed unlikely.

In a later prosecution of the Crystal Palace Theatre William Gardner was charged with employing seven children under the age of ten years and nine children over ten years, without acquiring the required standard of education certificate from the School Board.<sup>120</sup> Oscar Barrett, the theatre's manager, was also summoned for employing several children without having obtained necessary certificates. Because of the numbers involved it was decided that one child would be taken as a sample case. This concerned 11-year-old Bessie Trevesic. The Bench convicted in this case saying that the child was not sufficiently educated under the Act and a fine of 2s 6d was imposed with 13s costs.<sup>121</sup> Barrett had opened a school at his theatre the day after the School Board holidays had come to an end. Although too late to benefit Miss Trevesic the court viewed its opening as a positive step. In the light of this, it was decided that his other cases should be adjourned. By the first week of February the theatre school had employed a certificated head teacher and it was claimed the children were receiving an efficient education. A compromise was reached where the summons would be withdrawn as long as those particular children, aged between five and 13 years were withdrawn from production.

The order to dismiss the children would no doubt have inconvenienced Barrett but replacing their labor would have been relatively unproblematic. Barrett obtained his children from Signor Francesco, who, like so many dancing instructors, was able to supply any number of trained children to theatre managers at any given point in time.<sup>122</sup> Once Barrett had provided a theatre school he was at liberty to take on another troupe of children to replace those he was obliged to dismiss. Given, as shown earlier, the capacity of pantomime profits to finance a theatre's productions for the rest of the year, the 15s 6d penalty for the illegal employment of 11-year-old Bessie Trevesic would have been of little economic detriment to this successful manager. On the other hand, this sum equaled more than two weeks' wages for some young performers. Thus, School Board prosecutions proved to be decidedly more problematic for stage-children and their families than for their employers.

The 1876 Education Act established that it was parental duty to send children to school. On this premise, the London School Board, through the courts, targeted parents of theatrical children. The Teachers' union did not believe that the targeting of parents in this way was an effective strategy. "In dealing with children illegally employed the School Board Committees begin at the wrong end. It is the receiver and not the thief, the employer and not the employed, that should be prosecuted. The wages of the child more than pay the parent's fine, but the employer, who takes

a child at 3s. 6d, instead of a big lad at 7s, pockets the difference and goes free.<sup>123</sup> It was reported that the Lord Chief Justice at the time did not champion either party:

Considering what a life it must be for such infants there was not much to choose from between the people who employed them and the parents who, for the sake of money, bound them over for the purpose.<sup>124</sup>

This fitted with NVA thinking. Its members did not discriminate between parents and employers. In Fawcett's view:

To allow parents to depend on the earnings of their infants is one of those cruel kindnesses akin to indiscriminate alms giving and other pauperizing influences... it weakens parental responsibility and obscures the fact... that it is the duty of parents to support their children, and not that of children, during their tender years of infancy to support their parents.<sup>125</sup>

NVA supporters countered their challenges, thus. "All the sentiment which good people so often utter, that we are so hard hearted as to wish to take the bread out of the mouths of starving children should be translated in to the rather different statement that we wish to take the gin from the mouths of the drunken parents."<sup>126</sup> This thinking was in direct contrast to the Missionary mindset. "A large proportion of the children receive their own earnings and many being homeless find and pay for their own food and lodging... others are the whole support of invalid mothers to whom... really changing the order of Nature, give protective care."<sup>127</sup>

The NVA was unrelenting in its belief that parents were unscrupulous work-shy drunks and continued their drive for prosecutions. This included the parents of Gwendolin Quantrell who were brought before Marlborough Police in January 1889 because their daughter had attended school only 28 times out of a possible 63. They received a 6d fine with 2s costs. Three similar cases were also heard on the same day.<sup>128</sup> Considering the true value of a theatrical child's wage to many families, fines were financial penalties they could ill afford. Theatrical missionaries provided practical solutions to ease the working conditions of theatrical children because they appreciated the importance of a child's theatrical wage. The NVA showed a clear disregard for the implications of the prosecutions it instigated. This was particularly true of parents of children whose theatrical earnings "paid the rent."<sup>129</sup> Choice, with regard to whether or not to send children to school, was not a luxury readily available to many parents of child entertainers. Apart from the obvious financial need of the child's wage, it is important

to note that contractual obligations to employers severely limited parental choices. These legally binding contracts could tether children to employers for ten years. Parents were often in a no-win situation. If they sent their children to school they could be taken to court by theatrical employers. If they set them to work at the theatres they risked being summoned by the School Board. Either way they faced financial penalties and this helps to explain compliance with their children's employers. This is something too that theatrical missionaries appreciated but the concept remained alien to Fawcett and her supporters:

The more vigorously the School Board and their officers do their duty in insisting on regular attendance, the more surely those profiting from children's labour say to their parents, "you must take your child away from the Board school or other certified efficient elementary school and send them to a private school." These private schools sometimes exist as a sort of dependence to a theatrical dancing school; the fees are 10d to 1s a-week, for the reason that when the fee is over 9d the school ceases to be an elementary school as defined by the Education Act, and the children attending it are therefore removed from the jurisdiction of the School Board.<sup>130</sup>

NVA supporters suspected that attendance at affiliated schools "was not enforced, and... it was easier to conceal or escape the penalties on nonattendance."<sup>131</sup> This is plausible as it would not only have provided the industry with a more flexible workforce of children but also put an end to inconvenient and costly court appearances. Consequently, the threat to employers of having child performers removed from a production was alleviated as was the outlay of fines for their parents.

Managers consistently sought to isolate their child laborers from public gaze in order to maintain the illusions presented on stage and to keep the reality of the work hidden. The seclusion of affiliated schools further distanced theatrical child labor from the unwelcome attention of social purity campaigners and public awareness. The establishment of schools within theatres, while apparently addressing educational concerns, gave managers complete protection from outside interference.

The most successful producers employed the greatest numbers of children, more often and for the longest periods. This created a workload for children that seriously encroached on both the time and energy they could devote to study. Attendance, even at a compliant affiliated school, could prove demanding for the physical, mental, and emotional commitment the industry required from its children. Affiliated schools were thought to be so educationally disadvantageous to theatrical children that spasmodic

attendance at a Board school was thought preferable to full-time at a theatrically provided establishment:

Many of the School Board officers, including teachers, visitors, and inspectors, wink at very irregular attendance on the part of theatre children, and have even allowed such children, under ten, practically to take half-time who have not been allowed it by . . . the Board, because they are reluctant to drive the children to the sham education of these private schools.<sup>132</sup>

Fawcett drew attention to a Board Inspector's report on the school at the *Drury Lane Theatre*. Noting that the theatre had a labor force of 150 to 200 children the inspector found only 15 children to be in attendance. Of the school itself he observed:

The premises are wretched and even dangerous. Persons are constantly at work just outside the canvas walls of the schoolroom, and often the noise is so great as to drown the voice of the teacher. Most of the children appeared to suffer from cold on the day of my visit. There are only one set of registers, and only one set of reading books.<sup>133</sup>

Harris' school and the education he provided fell short on many counts and did not meet the minimum standard of efficiency. An indication of Harris' attitude toward the education of his child laborers and the school inspectors is evident from his statement during a deputation of theatrical representatives to the Home Secretary's office. Harris flippantly quipped that the school inspector had "found the desks were the wrong shape; that was altered, and the education was correct."<sup>134</sup> This was received with much laughter from those at the deputation meeting.

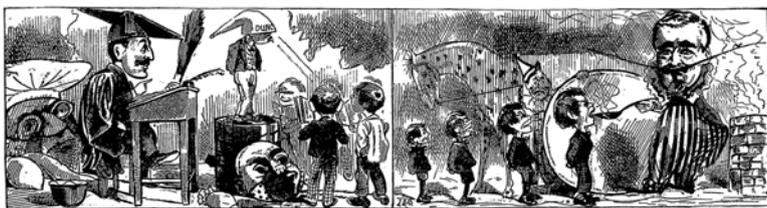
Proprietor Katti Lanner defended the education received by the pupils affiliated to her National Training School of Dancing who were regularly employed at Drury Lane, thus:

The children were at school from 9 (or, in the case of the younger ones, half-past 9) till a quarter or half past 12. The rehearsals were taken between that time and a quarter to 2. At 2 the children returned to school, and at half past 4, if necessary, the rehearsals were resumed. On the occasion of morning performances the children attended school till 1 and took their books with them to the dressing rooms for the purpose of learning the next day's lessons.<sup>135</sup>

From previous accounts the hours Lanner suggests that were given over to training seem remarkably few. However, even accepting her claims to be correct, this was still a punishing schedule considering that children would

not leave the theatre before ten at the earliest and often not till midnight before embarking on a long journey home. Speaking on the education of theatrical children in general, Fawcett further claimed that “out of an estimated number of something like a thousand children employed in theatres and music-halls in London alone, school accommodation has been provided at the theatres for considerably less than forty.”<sup>136</sup>

It is difficult to accept that theatre schools could provide much of an education. Notwithstanding the “incessant noise,” at a basic level, the cramped backstage conditions could come nowhere near to meeting the Education Commission’s general recommendations to the new School Board. For every pupil this included “suitable premises, airiness and lightness of site and a reasonable extent of playground...and 10 square feet...*minimum*, space for each child.”<sup>137</sup> The Education Commission recognized that there were two ways to allocate pupils the recommended space; one was to enlarge school buildings and the second to enroll fewer pupils in smaller schools. Neither of these options was feasible for theatrical school space. The first incarnation of Drury Lane theatre school for example consisted of “part of the paint room partitioned off by canvas scenery.”<sup>138</sup> Backstage was essentially a place of work with, every foot allocated to the numerous and indispensable departments of production. Therefore, expansion of school space was extremely unlikely. Reduction of numbers on the register of a backstage school was also not a viable proposition. This was not lost on the satirists of the day.



**Figure 4.6** Advancing a Stage *Funny Folks* (London, England), Saturday, January 22, 1887. Embedded text, top: “Mr. Augustus Harris has opened a school for the Pantomime Children in the Painting room of Drury Lane Theatre”—*Topical Times*... “Mr. William Holland has started a soup kitchen at the Albert Palace Children at Battersea”—*Standard*. Embedded text, bottom: If this sort of thing grows, free schooling and free feeding, parents will be eager to get their children “on” in the Pantomime as to get them into the Blue Coat School. It will have to be done by voting papers and personal canvases.

Child performers were, first and foremost, employees and production needs dictated their numbers over and above names on the school register. Factory children would never have been expected to learn the three Rs on the shop floor; yet, this was precisely what was expected of theatrical children. This is something that strengthened Fawcett's argument:

The employment of children under ten is now absolutely prohibited with regard to all agricultural and manufacturing industry... A child of less than fourteen must not be employed unless he has passed the Sixth Standard. But this prohibition and these restrictions are not put into force with regard to children employed in theatres.<sup>139</sup>

The theatrical industry's apathy toward the schooling of its child employees severely restricted the right of child performers to an education. The industry's adoption of this strategy placed child performers in a unique position among their peers. The widely held change that for the majority of children had come to separate childhood from adulthood and work from the schoolroom was alien to the theatrical child.

This situation permitted the theatrical industry to continue employing child labor and while this did not sit well with the idealized notion of childhood, it must be said that it also provided children with an increasingly rare opportunity to earn. Apart from its waged benefits, the chance to perform brought the adulation craved by child entertainers, as also the reflected status and celebrity enjoyed by their families. The work might have had further liberating effects, particularly for working-class performers. Of working-class girls in general, Eric Hopkins has written, "In the home they took second place to the boys who had preference in many ways... They were expected to take a full part in the household chores... and to help nurse the sick... their pay was usually half that of their male counterparts."<sup>140</sup> The gendered and demanding nature of theatre work freed performing girls from domestic drudgery both at home and in service. Theatrical wage rates and associated celebrity raised their economic worth and their status within their home. Further advantages are demonstrated by Nina Auerbach's observations of a young Ellen Terry. "The stage had given her the power to caper around as a boy, to play godly games with others' laughter and tears... a mercurial boy/girl who laughed at piety and whose body could carry her anywhere."<sup>141</sup> These were the sort of benefits that ensured the cooperation and support of performers and their families in the entertainments industry's battle with activists.

NVA campaigners needed to rethink their strategy and turned their attentions to the targeting of consumers as a way of putting an end to the employment of theatrical children. This though would invariably prove problematic. An audience purchased a commodity which to them was created and consumed simultaneously during the performance. Consequently, audiences identified theatrical children in relation to their public persona and not as the laborers' that campaigners portrayed them to be. NVA members would have had to alter theatregoers' perceptions of theatrical child labor and make a convincing case, to persuade each one to forfeit the individual pleasure he or she derived from watching a child upon the stage. Regardless of motivation, this would prove a complex and difficult task to embark on. In addition to the support of child performers, their families, and the audience, the industry had a wide network of powerful allies who provided collaborative support in ensuring the continued employment of stage-children. Playwrights and theatre critics joined the debate in defense of theatrical managers. "There are some people so strangely constituted that they do not appreciate the stage-child; they do not comprehend its uses; they do not understand its beauties. We should not be angry with them. We should rather pity them."<sup>142</sup>

A large contingent of those who relied on the industry for their own livelihoods belonged to literary and journalistic circles and this was advantageous to employers, in getting their arguments both widely publicized and promoted. This is something Fawcett acknowledged:

Its leaders have considerable power of influencing the press, and providing, as it does, so largely for the amusement of the public, a thousand pens are ready to leap from their inkstands in its defence, if there is any idea of an attack being made upon it.<sup>143</sup>

Fawcett was right to voice concern. The positive power of the press was a crucial confederate. This is best demonstrated by drawing on the result of a contemporary campaign set around a comparative casual female workforce.<sup>144</sup>

Of the success of the 1888 Match Girls Strike, Judith Walkowitz observes:

To contemporaries, the "notable" victory in 1888, of the match girls against Bryant and May demonstrated how, with the aid of a "sympathetic" press and public opinion, "the poorest and most helpless portion of the industrial community" could triumph over, "the wealthiest and most powerful firms" in the metropolis.<sup>145</sup>

Conversely, if the same support was misplaced the outcome for the child worker could be disastrous. Of course, the press had little to lose by supporting the Match Girls, on the other hand the theatrical industry generated lots of business for the press and so, for the most part, theatrical bosses could rely on their support.<sup>146</sup> Not surprisingly, the press embraced the case for the continued use of theatrical child labor. Much propagandist work was undertaken by the press in favor of the entertainment industry.<sup>147</sup>

The professions of journalists, critics, and playwrights were interchangeable and dependent on each other for favorable reviews they would write positively of each other's work even if was not particularly good. This reciprocal relationship had the potential to provide a safety net for the entertainment industry. One critic of this voiced concern when claiming that "an entirely free and independent press never did, does not and we cannot accept ever will exist."<sup>148</sup> Evidence supports this. "Sir Henry Irving presiding over the 35th anniversary dinner of the newspaper Press Fund made a toast to the 'Prosperity of the Newspaper Press Fund' . . . The politician and the actor divide between them the distinction of supplying the most constant material for the most intimate and searching vigilance of the newspaper press."<sup>149</sup> The industry used the press to its advantage at every opportunity. At the height of debates on theatrical child employment Harris singled out Fawcett for particular public ridicule. An open debate between the two was carried out in a series of letters to *The Times*. Here, among other things, Harris labeled Fawcett's campaign as being overzealous and wrote that her claims against him were "wild unfounded and libellous."<sup>150</sup> When Fawcett challenged him to prove that even one of her statements were false, he deflected his inability to answer with personal verbal attacks on her. "Not I alone but everybody who has truly investigated the matter is an unbiased spirit who has come to the conclusion that Mrs. Fawcett's assertions only exist in her energetic imagination."<sup>151</sup> Without the collaboration of the press and other interests outside the immediate nucleus of the theatre itself, theatre managers could not have so comprehensively countered such a sustained campaign against the employment of performing children.

As Judith Walkowitz has observed, NVA supporters led an onslaught of public condemnation on what they saw as the immorality of the stage.<sup>152</sup> The missionary camp on the other hand were in no doubt of the entertainment industry being a powerful and established force to be reckoned with. "That theatres exist and will exist, flourish and will flourish as the favourite pastime of any overworked population must be accepted as a patent fact."<sup>153</sup> This mutual understanding between the theatre and those

## HOLIDAY HOUSE.

In spite of previous bad weather, Saturday was as fair a day as could be wished, and the guests, resident and transient who took part in the festive house-warming at the above-mentioned homestead had nothing to complain of as regards weather.

Many and kind were the letters of refusal, and brimful of sympathy in the daring project mapped out by the new mistress of the pretty house; amongst them Lady Grey Egerton, the Countess of Selkirk, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Morrison, Mrs. Eva McLaren, the Misses Stopford Brooke, Mrs. James Miller, Miss Steer, Mr. and Mrs. Stead, and many others too numerous to mention. Amongst those present were some charming American visitors from Maine, Massachusetts, and Minnesota.

The festivities were preceded by a short, bright, and very simple Consecration service, conducted by the Rev. Courthope Todd, including the hymn which had been written for the occasion by Mrs. Ormiston Chant, who offered the Consecration prayer. Very sweet sounded the voices from the lawn as they sang the following words to the well-known tune "S. Peter":—

O God our Father, Thee we bless  
For all Thy love hath made  
Of sunshine in the wilderness,  
And in the wild-wood, shade.  
For all that makes the earth so fair,  
Gay flowers, fruitful trees;  
Sweet songs of birds in chorus rare;  
The whispering summer breeze.  
For times of holiday and rest,  
When care is laid aside;  
When 'mid sweet scenes the heart is blest  
With pleasures that abide.  
For sunlight on the summer land,  
For moonlight on the sea,  
And star-worlds fashioned by Thy hand,  
For all that tells of Thee.  
But most we bless Thee that Thy love  
Doth bid Thy children come  
From joys below, to joys above,  
To find in Thee their home.  
And that through Jesus Christ may we  
With open face behold  
Eternal Pity deep and free,  
Our frailty to enfold,  
Soft shining from our Father's face  
Upon our sins and fears,  
Dear earnest of a resting-place  
Where there are no more tears.  
So, Father, take our praise, we pray,  
For all Thy mercies given,  
Till home on earth shall pass away,  
And our last home be Heaven.

Tea and coffee with abundant supplies of cake and bread-and butter were consumed out in the open air; and what with lawn-tennis, and the performance of the "Golden Boat Action," strolling through the orchard, the swing, chatting, the pretty performance of a game called "Statues," by the theatre children staying at Holiday House for a happy fortnight, and finally Sir Roger de Coverley on the lawn, the hours passed all too quickly away, and a most enjoyable time ended.

Already Holiday House has entertained its first batch of guests, and the ballet and pantomime girls of the Theatrical Mission, Macready House, Covent Garden, have tasted country pleasures under circumstances that must leave a mark for good upon their whole lives.

A batch of orphans from the same mission has now taken their place, and with these is a handsome, forlorn negro baby of nine months old!

The next batch will consist of grown people; and altogether much lasting joy and loving kindness is likely to be the outcome of this new departure. No printed rules or sectarian influences will mar the courtesy and broad-minded religiousness of the management of Holiday House, and though there are evening prayers for the help and comfort of those who are in sympathy, attendance at them is perfectly optional, as the spirit that originated and pervades the whole scheme is that of the poet who sang,

"He prayeth best who loveth best  
All things both great and small."

Figure 4.7 Holiday House, *Woman's Herald*, August 8, 1891; issue 145.

spreading the word of God helped in the industry's quest for respectability and its fight against NVA's claims of immorality.

Widespread support for the industry allowed theatrical bosses to adopt strategies that hindered or blocked each avenue of contestation chosen by the NVA and its supporters.<sup>154</sup>

Clearly then, while thousands of children continued to knock on the door of the Theatrical Mission and its provision had expanded to opening an orphanage and a convalescent holiday home for young performers NVA members were, once again, looking toward yet another strategy to put an end to the employment of child performers.

In 1889, acutely aware that the previous attempts had made little real impact, the NVA turned to *new* legislation as a vehicle for its aspirations. Further evidence of the value of children to the entertainment industry is to be found in the strength of opposition to this new assault on their employment. This new campaign, the response to it, and the outcomes for all concerned, are explored in chapter 5.

## 5. Protective Legislation and the Theatrical Child

Throughout the years of NVA's theatrical agitation, the London Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (LSPCC) was conducting a separate, concurrent campaign around child welfare.<sup>1</sup> Through the winter of 1885–86, the LSPCC Law Committee drew up a Bill for the Better Prevention of Cruelty to Children. If passed, this Bill would allow the British law to intervene for the first time in relations between parents and children. Police would be able to obtain warrants to enter homes where children were thought to be in danger and would be given the power to arrest anyone found ill-treating a child. This represented a major challenge to Victorian understanding of property rights and the sanctity of private domestic life. As will become clear, it was the issues around the employment of theatrical children instigated by the NVA, that came to dominate the much debated Bill.

Five years of NVA campaigning had failed to secure protection for theatrical children through existing child laws. However its very visible campaign had brought controversial practices associated with theatrical child labor into the public arena and as a consequence, the NVA had come to believe that theatre children could not be passed over in any *new* child legislation. Having exhausted most avenues open to furthering their cause through the existing legislation, social purity campaigners recognized the LSPCC's Bill as a possible breach in the entertainments industry's defenses. In 1888, the association pressed for child performers to be specifically included in the proposed Bill with aims of outlawing their employment.

The LSPCC had found an early ally in Lord Iddesleigh who, in 1886, agreed to introduce the Bill in the House of Lords. However, he died before he was able to fulfill this promise. The Society never again received the sort of unconditional support offered by Iddesleigh and in subsequent attempts to have the Bill read several issues were contested by various bodies.<sup>2</sup> Undeterred, in spring 1888 a rapidly expanding London SPCC "had transformed child protection into a major social issue. Largely

because of this activity the question of children's rights now permeated a broader public conscience."<sup>3</sup> After certain concessions and with clauses agreed upon, in February 1889 an even more radical version of the original bill was proposed by A. J. Mundella. This achieved a second reading in the House of Commons on April 4, 1889. The now named, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), launched a massive campaign to defend the Bill that went to a committee stage in June and July. Even with growing support for the Bill the NVA recognized as unrealistic its expectation to end all theatrical child employment and modified demands by calling for the inclusion of a clause in the NSPCC Bill specifically for theatrical children requesting that:

The employment of children in theatres be brought under the factory acts as had been recommended unanimously by the Royal Commission on the Education Acts. To prevent the employment of children under ten altogether and only allow the employment of girls under 16 and boys under fourteen up to seven o'clock—that is to say only for afternoon performances.<sup>4</sup>

NVA member Charles Mitchell went on to explain that this fell short of expectations.

“We would prefer total prohibition of child performances such as exists for example in some of the American States.”<sup>5</sup> This was misguided; although more comprehensive preventative laws were in place in the United States, American theatrical employers adopted similarly evasive strategies to their British counterparts and continued to illegally employ theatrical children. Also, as foreign troupes were not covered by the law in either country, American children frequently performed in Britain and British children were regularly engaged overseas.<sup>6</sup> However, years of previous unfruitful campaigning brought a realization that the requested total ban would be too much too soon. Crucially, the NVA acknowledged that they would need to make some allowances. Members agreed that it might be acceptable “for the employment of one or two children in an ordinary play for bona fide dramatic purposes,” and that “provision should be made for the granting of special licenses’ in these exceptional circumstances.”<sup>7</sup> This latter compromise gave the association the best chance of achieving some of their aims. Conversely, the theatrical clause proposed by the NVA was to become the Achilles heel of the whole SPCC Bill. As will become apparent, the cooperation of influential associates and mass support from a wide range of people who depended on the success of the entertainment industry proved a serious threat to SPCC demands. So much so, that among its members and supporters there was deep concern that the unwillingness of

the House of Commons to support the theatrical clause would imperil the whole Bill.<sup>8</sup> Fears were intensified by awareness of widespread contempt for the NVA's moral purist stance against the theatre.

Benjamin Waugh claimed that "The NSPCC is not just another children's charity. It is an organisation which will fight to obtain the citizenship of every child and justice for all children."<sup>9</sup> If we take Eric Hopkins' argument, the significance of this statement for child performers cannot be overstated. "Revelations of cruelty... coupled with restrictions on the length and nature of child labour did bring a change in attitude and a greater realisation that children... had to be treated differently. The forming of the NSPCC in 1889 and the passing of the 1889 Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act are a sufficient indication of attitudes."<sup>10</sup> Prominent theatre impresarios and their supporters insisted that such laws need not apply to children employed to entertain. Augustus Harris was one of the most vocal objectors to the proposed clause. He claimed that "theatrical children were entitled to exceptional treatment; they were not in any sense like the children who were protected by the Factory Acts. Their labour was not a hardship but a pleasure."<sup>11</sup> This is a crucial consideration because it is indicative of widely promoted and accepted thinking that child entertainers did not warrant the same rights as other children. NSPCC members were in agreement with NVA thinking that no children under ten should be employed. However, in the face of the powerful opposition from theatrical interests, its leader Benjamin Waugh was willing to sacrifice the theatrical child's right to protection in order to secure the same for all other children.<sup>12</sup>

The NSPCC had shown great tenacity in its continued fight to implement an exceptionally radical proposal to instate a law that would intervene in the previously sacrosanct privacy of the family and override parental control.<sup>13</sup> That it should yield to pressure from a single industry over its misuse of child labor in a climate averse to child employment is undeniably telling. Despite the NVA having modified its demands and in the face of the idealized entitlement to childhood embedded in the broad public psyche, the rights of theatrical children continued to be seen as expendable. Moreover, the strength of opposition to the NVA-requested clause emphasizes the power of the theatrical industry and the fundamental contribution children made to its success. Ultimately, even the watered down clause sought by the NVA proved unachievable. An amendment to the Bill specifically concerning theatrical children *was* passed by the House of Lords and subsequently by the Commons. This stated that "children between seven and ten years of age could be employed on the stage provided they applied for a license to do so."<sup>14</sup> Although this control was introduced, it fell far short of the NVA's original aspirations and as shown below, made relatively

little impact on employers' ability to recruit children to the stage. What follows is an examination of how the industry was able to secure special dispensation in the Children's Charter when existing Acts prohibited child employment in any other form for children under ten years of age and the consequences of this for all parties concerned.

## THE THEATRICAL INDUSTRY AND THE CCP BILL

As prominent and wealthy members of society, large theatre owners, successful managers, and popular actors were themselves part of influential networks that could prove useful in both mobilizing support for and representing theatrical interests. This influence could be informal through participation in the series of social activities that were part and parcel of Victorian middle-class culture but informal connections could also be structured into more formal sites.

Once leading figures had become successful in the theatrical world they increasingly sought and were awarded prestigious positions in the public sphere. Augustus Harris for example, became a member of the London County Council in 1890, served as London Sheriff (1890–91) and was subsequently knighted.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, as J. P. Wearing put it “Harris had the knack of surrounding himself with clever assistants and friends.”<sup>16</sup>

A crucial catalyst in the rise and rise of theatrical luminaries was their membership of the many private gentlemen's clubs that flourished in nineteenth-century London and facilitated masculine intercourse across a range of professions.<sup>17</sup> Linkages were also ensured and bolstered by “an astonishing boom in freemasonry.” By 1894, there were 382 lodges in London alone. The first Lodges where membership focused on those in the music or theatrical professions, were formed from about 1870.<sup>18</sup> London's largest employer of theatrical children Augustus Harris was “initiated as a freemason in Edinburgh at a special meeting of the St Clare Lodge on 6 March 1875, passing through all three degrees in a single night. . . . In the autumn of 1885, Harris conceived the idea of forming a lodge that would meet in a specially furnished Masonic temple within the Drury Lane Theatre itself.”<sup>19</sup> The fact that Harris found space within his theatre to house a Masonic temple that he “sumptuously fitted out,” is indicative of where his priorities lay regarding business needs and those of his child employees.<sup>20</sup> As shown above, when Harris found it necessary to open a school-room within his theatre, the children were taught in dangerous and noisy

conditions behind a canvas screen, in a clearing of the paint room. The children received their schooling in these conditions throughout 1887 and 1888, and this was set to continue until the situation was brought to light by a School Board officer. About four years after the school was opened, Harris eventually permitted children to be taught in his “very warm and comfortable,” Masonic Room.<sup>21</sup> This was given a very public profile.



Figure 5.1 The Employment of Children in Pantomime, *The Graphic*, March 23, 1889.

Many years later, Miss Edith Collins who was the first teacher to instruct the pantomime children at Harris' school recalled how the school room floor "often had to be cleared of champagne corks left from a Masonic dinner held on the previous night, before lessons could begin."<sup>22</sup>

It is not surprising though that Harris would address the needs and comforts of his fellow masons over and above the education of his child employees. Firstly, his demands on the labor of his child workforce left little time for them to study and secondly, theatrical employment was based on talent and gaining an education did nothing to add value to a theatrical child's labor.

On the other hand, freemasonry membership among theatricals provided the industry with a "ready access to the rich and powerful in government and the professions."<sup>23</sup> Henry Irving for example, "ran the Beefsteak Room backstage at the Lyceum as a neo-masonic pressure group, using its regular largely all-male gatherings, thickly peopled with influential members of the Order, to elevate the status of drama in the minds of the British



**Figure 5.2** The Original Masonic Temple, Drury Lane Theatre, circa 1886. Source: The Drury Lane Lodge 2127, <http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/ajgoater/history>.

establishment.”<sup>24</sup> Masonic alliances forged at meetings were reciprocal and confidential and, as will become apparent, when the campaign against theatrical child labor was at its height, members such as Harris and Irving were able to draw on the support of a wide range of powerful and influential fellow masons.

Freemasonry also incorporated a philanthropic element that was a necessary aspect of Victorian middle-class responsibility and status and evident in all sectors of public life.<sup>25</sup> This sort of involvement was a powerful unifying point within lodges but was, for the most part, hidden from public gaze. Gaining support from the wider community demanded more visible displays of philanthropy that theatrical interests were very well-placed to provide. Theatre managers emphasized their public spiritedness and respectability by magnanimous philanthropic acts. They frequently, put on free performances for invited audiences of underprivileged and disabled children, the old, and the infirm. Typically, one large theatre owner had “3000 children to be his guests at a performance of *Cinderella*.”<sup>26</sup> Managers often staged benefits that were used to taunt those who criticized the industry, whose most vocal critics were singled out in the press for particular ridicule. Typical comment included “Narrow minded lunatics and bigots please note. The Directors of the ‘Empire’ have forwarded a cheque for £880.11.10d to the Lord Mayor for distribution to the poor.”<sup>27</sup> “I wonder what Mrs. Chant and her friends will say to the result at the Empire on behalf of the poor of London. Over £1200... was the sum.”<sup>28</sup> In addition to amassing support from all quarters, the industry was also pro-active in defending its use of theatrical children and countering the claims made against them.

This sort of positive publicity for acts of community generosity clearly bolstered theatrical profiles but the ability of theatrical interests to muster support in their opposition to the proposed inclusion of stage-children in the PCC Bill, is more telling. Members of working men’s societies across London supported the continued employment of children in the theatre. Representatives of 15,000 London workers met with Augustus Harris to voice their opposition to the NVA’s proposed clause. The Secretary of the East London Sugar Workers and Labourers Council, who led the delegation, argued that, if passed, “thousands of hungry little ones would be thrown upon the streets the next hard winter.” He criticized the Bill’s promoters who had made no movement to “set on foot (as far as he knew) to make up to these girls and boys for the necessaries and extra comforts which their own earnings, up to the present had helped to procure.”<sup>29</sup> He was further reported to have said:

Hundreds of these men were the parents of children employed in theatres and music-halls and were happy to have them so employed. The earnings of these children came in to supplement the earnings of the parents at a specially (sic) hard season of the year, and in many cases the addition meant all the difference between comparative sufficiency and absolute want.<sup>30</sup>

That the delegation represented so many working fathers of theatrical children calls into question Fawcett's claims that the majority of these parents substituted their children's theatrical labor for their own.<sup>31</sup> Further evidence that Fawcett and supporters failed to understand the economic circumstances theatre children came from is reflected in her critique of parents who allowed their offspring to travel home alone late at night. Fawcett interpreted this as parental neglect. Conversely, Barlee's direct, individualized approach established an alternative explanation that emphasized how parental decisions on this matter were governed by necessity rather than by choice. One woman able to afford to accompany her child at a cost that would make such an option prohibitive for most serves to illustrate this point:

On one occasion, when she had an engagement and constant rehearsals at a considerable distance from her home, her mother always went with her; the deduction from her wage for double omnibus fares being 8s a week, but often has taken as much as £1 to 30 shillings.<sup>32</sup>

Theatre managers could also draw upon the support of many thousands of people who were dependent on the industry for their own living. In addition to the individual needs of families, there existed a wider, mass need, and desire for the sustained and systematic hiring of theatrical children. Never more so than among those who were employed directly within entertainment venues and who relied solely on the success of a production, for their own livelihoods. Theirs was a precarious employment at the best of times. Setting aside individual failings that could result in dismissal, the dangers associated with working in such a hazardous environment made life highly contingent. Fire was a constant risk. In addition to individual accidents collective disaster could displace workers overnight:

"London. The Alhambra Theatre destroyed by *fire*. No Victims," that was the startling announcement which I read in the telegraphic intelligence of the *Fanfulla*. But, respected *Fanfulla*, many scores of victims must necessarily be made through the burning down of the great theatre in Leicester Square. It is towards Christmas-time that, "the ants behind the baize" are

most laboriously busy. Scene painters and scene shifters, stage carpenters and property men, supernumeraries, ballet girls and “extras” are all toiling and moiling every night and day with the intent of diverting you and your children at Christmas-time; and all for a little bit of bread. The burning down of a great theatre means not only the throwing out of employment of a great tribe of industrious and harmless folk but the destruction of workmen’s tools and the dresses of poor young women and the spreading far and wide of misery and destitution.<sup>33</sup>

The Theatrical Mission was again vital at such times.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, anything that closed a production, from poor reviews to the sort of disasters described here, could have devastating consequences for the multitude of financial dependents who had emerged from the commercialization of entertainment. Equally though, positive developments could bring firm benefits to the same needy, mass workforce, and its dependents. Child entertainers did just this during the last two decades of the nineteenth-century. Child performers were market leaders within the profession. As particular crowd pleasers and profitable assets, children helped to keep profits buoyant in a notoriously uncertain industry. Therefore, as supporters of anything that could help to maintain profits, those directly employed in theatres were enthusiastic advocates of theatrical child labor.

Marie Bancroft for example, drew on her long experience as a child and adult actress when she wrote in defense of what she termed “the continued employment of little children in the theatre.”<sup>35</sup> Her comments clearly comprised a response related to the issues of morality, education, and earnings of theatre children highlighted by NVA campaigners:

As to the employment of little children in theatres, I fail to understand what baneful influence there can be in their atmosphere to affect their moral nature of any child. My experience of our theatres is that children there are so petted and made much of, so corrected and cared for, that when the run of a play in which they have been employed, comes to an end the little creatures often cry bitterly at the thought of being taken away, probably in their hearts dreading a return to squalor, neglect or rough treatment. I have seen such children kindly cared for in various ways and have known the poverty of their parents relieved by subscriptions, and, in many cases, weekly allowances from very meagre purses often when the money could ill be spared I have also known actresses so teach some of these children that by the time their term of service is ended they have been able to read and spell fairly well—surely a comparison to many neglected ones outside the playhouse. . . . What is more touching on the stage than the prattle of a clever child; what more refining in itself? . . . As one

who has been a “stage-child” herself and who well remembers the value of her little earnings, let me plead now for those in a like position, for I hope that my voice may be regarded in some way as an expert.<sup>36</sup>

It is difficult to accept Mrs. Bancroft’s interpretation of theatrical child work, given that it contrasts sharply with the events of her stage-childhood as recalled in her published memoirs:

I wish I could recall a happy childhood; but alas I can remember only work and responsibility from a very tender age . . . trudging by my father’s side in all weathers to the theatre, where I had to play somebody else’s child . . . my poor little body was often sadly tired. I was roused many a time from sound sleep to go upon the stage and sometimes, in my half wakefulness, would begin the wrong recitation. At the age of five I recited “Ode to the Passions,” . . . My poor little arms and legs were so red from the cold . . . for a long while my health was delicate.<sup>37</sup>

Bancroft’s conflicting accounts were seized upon by campaigners and the two versions were juxtaposed within the pages of the *Vigilance Record* where it was reported that:

We do not think we need add many words to the above touching and significant extracts. They form collectively, one of the strongest arguments against the employment of infants on the stage which we have ever seen in print.<sup>38</sup>

It was also pointed out that Mrs. Bancroft’s childhood experience was as a performer from an established theatrical family. She had two parents to teach her the profession and to safeguard and accompany her on engagements. Often her mother and father played alongside her in the same production:

Very few of the hundreds of stage infants employed in pantomimes, &c, have this, all suffer from the hardships so graphically described by Mrs. Bancroft. They have the unhappy childhood, the deprivation of leisure, the deadly sleeplessness after over-labour, the journeys “in all weathers” to the theatre, the “poor little body often sadly tired,” the legs and arms pinched with the bitter cold the words drilled into the young head night and day.<sup>39</sup>

Whether or not Bancroft was deliberately selective in separating her adult perception of child employment on the stage from her own experiences can only be speculated. What is clear is that she drew on her long connection and status within the industry as a vehicle to try to discredit criticisms from the NVA and to amass support for challenges to the Bill.<sup>40</sup>

Bancroft was just one of a series of correspondents who, through letters to the press, debated issues of theatrical child employment and its place in the Children's Charter. Supporters on both sides of the debate engaged in this public exchange. However, while this method of deliberation formed a central part of the NVA's campaign, the industry had access to more productive modes of action.

At the height of the debate Augustus Harris and Henry Irving led a deputation of "managers and others" who met the Earl of Dunraven, "with a view to throwing some light on the subject of the employment of children in theatres."<sup>41</sup> It is important to note here that the deputation included representatives from the London School Board who, according to Harris, had investigated Mrs. Fawcett's claims about theatre children and found them "to be fabrications."<sup>42</sup> Harris argued that School Board members "bore witness to the improvement in the appearance and manners of the youngsters after becoming connected with those places of amusement (theatres) for a little time."<sup>43</sup> It is worth noting that the opinion of School Board officers did not necessarily represent the majority's view. George Behlmer shows that during the same period another deputation of the London School Board claimed that "38 of the board's 53 members supported a resolution prohibiting children under ten from employment on the stage."<sup>44</sup> However, as was the case in the theatrical world, significant numbers of School Board officers were also Freemasons and it is plausible to assume that this might have had some bearing on the inclusion of those two men in the deputation.<sup>45</sup> Freemasonry alliances might also partly explain why neither "School Boards nor Attendance Committees [had] the courage to carry out the manifest requirements of the law."<sup>46</sup>

In addition, Board officers were elected by ratepayers. It was reported that one manager, found guilty for unlawfully employing theatrical children, was quick to remind them of this. "As a large rate payer he thought his treatment from the School Board was extremely unfair." The implicit pressure associated with re-election, is evident in a comment contributed to an investigation into the reluctance of School Board officers to prosecute employers. "He is a voter, a guardian, a town councilor. Perhaps, as I have known more than once, a J.P. and it would be unneighbourly to interfere with him."<sup>47</sup> Harris' deputation then comprised a tight knit, unified community of powerful allies. The group was met by a sympathetic audience in the Home Secretary's representative Mr. Stuart-Wortley, Member of Parliament:

Such a deputation as the present, introduced by persons whose names of themselves were a guarantee for humane treatment and enlightened management,

was one which could not be disregarded, and whose wishes and statements were entitled to very much weight. They could not leave out of sight the fact that behind the deputation of managers there was and must be much weight of public opinion, because the stage was, after all to a great extent what the public made of it (hear hear), and the treatment of persons employed upon the stage was in the long run regulated by public opinion. The question was whether public opinion would support anything like a crusade against the employment of children in pantomimes. He had himself very great doubt that they would support anything of that kind. Undoubtedly the public would require that these children should be very well treated. (Cheers).<sup>48</sup>

The Earl of Dunraven responded positively. By July he was reported to have stigmatized the NVA for the “sour Puritanism that wittingly or unwittingly, has not stuck at slander or fabrication to bolster up a crusade which to the practical man appears in the true light of a persecution.”<sup>49</sup> Dunraven opposed NVA’s calls for a clause in the Cruelty to Children (Prevention) Bill, to prohibit children under ten from theatrical employment. He reasoned that a child working in the theatre “would hardly come under the heading of cruelty.”<sup>50</sup> During a House of Lords debate he strongly argued on this point:

There was not a particle of evidence that there had ever been any cruelty inflicted on children who worked in the theatre . . . A prohibition of this kind . . . involved gross calumny on those who employed these children [and if] prevented from playing in theatres, hardship and injustice would be inflicted on the children who played and their parents and friends.<sup>51</sup>

Dunraven claimed that the prohibition of theatrical child labor would infer that “the kind of work performed by children in theatres is attended with absolute physical suffering amounting to cruelty and that even if the House of Lords were ‘unanimous in considering it advisable that children under ten should not be employed in theatres,’ the proper course to pursue is to deal with the matter by an amendment to the Factory Acts or by legislation of a similar character.”<sup>52</sup> Dunraven was a powerful and crucial ally to theatrical employers. Interestingly though, his allegiance with theatrical interests may not have rested, solely, on his acceptance of the managers’ persuasive arguments. Irving, Harris, and Dunraven were fellow Freemasons with Irving and Dunraven belonging to the same Masonic Lodge. The reciprocal and lasting bond they shared is evident from their Masonic friendship.<sup>53</sup> Equally strong support for the industry was to be found in the House of Commons. For example, Henry Labouchere,

Member of Parliament, was a vehement supporter of the industry's continued employment of children. His driving force in the House of Commons equaled that of Dunraven in the House of Lords regarding the passing of the theatrical child clause in the Children's Charter. In one 1889 parliamentary speech, Labouchere had said:

Why should you make one law for theatres and another law for factories? The reason was that a theatre was not a factory, and that a factory was not a theatre. (Cheers and laughter) One could not imagine that a child would want to go to work in a factory. The work was very hard there, but in a theatre it was exactly the reverse. In fact a theatre was a sort of kindergarten... the only injury to children was to their stomachs from too many sugar plums and cakes.<sup>54</sup>

This is not to say, though, that Dunraven's and Labouchere's espousal of the industry's case went unchallenged. However, from the outset it was clear that even those who sympathized with the NVA did not share in its opposition to the theatre. As one observer put it:

Without bringing any charge of immorality against the stage, many people held, to use a common figure of speech, that the surface of the stage was a slippery surface. In their view, therefore, some limit ought to be placed on the employment of young children. It was, however, in no way intended to cast a reflection upon the theatrical profession.<sup>55</sup>

The industry's convincing portrayal of the theatrical child at play, meant that even those allied to NVA thinking on child labor could not see a place in the Bill specifically for theatrical children. A degree of ambivalence was introduced into the debate by Lord Norton, who argued that "premature employment was cruelty and thus theatre children needed to be excluded from the theatre under this age."<sup>56</sup> On the second reading of the CCP Bill though, in the House of Lords, the Earl of Mar, inverting the argument of Norton, claimed more forcefully that retention of the clause to exclude under-tens from the stage would "promote a certain amount of misery, if not actual cruelty to the little ones."<sup>57</sup>

The dual view that subsequently came to dominate thinking on the issue is evident from a statement made by the Archbishop of Canterbury. "No cases of personal cruelty had been proven against the industry... [But] children should not be put prematurely to very hard work."<sup>58</sup> It was about this latter aspect of the work that even those who supported the continuance of child labor felt most ambivalent. Benjamin Waugh argued that including stage-children in the CCP Bill was not appropriate. He claimed

that “his society had taken the greatest trouble to ascertain whether there had been any cruelty to children in theatres and had failed to find a single case.” Waugh dismissed an alternative argument that children needed to begin stage careers early in life and equally rejected the notion that to limit theatrical child employment, meant depriving the very poorest of income:

Theatre managers, like all other men of business, seem to take the material most ready for their purpose, and neither the appearance, the behaviour, nor the conversation of gutter children, nor even of the hungry and destitute, is favourable to theatrical performance...pantomime children are chosen from the comparatively better-off classes, and solely in the commercial interests of their employers.<sup>59</sup>

What Waugh failed to see was that, unlike other manufactures, the theatrical industry’s child labor was also its raw material. Further, Harris himself had boasted that theatrical employers, “took ragamuffins but manufactured them into respectable members of society.”<sup>60</sup> Even though Waugh remained adamant that children under ten should not be in any form of paid employment he argued that license provision would deal with exceptional individual cases for child performers.<sup>61</sup> He was equally insistent though that the clause asked for by the NVA be denied.

As the debate grew in intensity the NVA increasingly emphasized performance as labor. Socialist H. W. Hobart stringently argued on this point. “What we are immediately concerned about is the material effect on the children, and we object to the enterprising theatrical manager just as we object to the factory owner getting cheap labour at the expense of their general well-being.”<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, Fawcett highlighted the opposition faced by Lord Shaftesbury before the eventual implementation of The Factory Act, in 1844 and argued that just as those who “condemned him [Lord Shaftesbury] were wrong,” their own objectors would come round to their way of thinking.<sup>63</sup>

In response, theatrical supporters deliberately focused their defense on the public face of the work and argued this was the sum of the theatrical child’s labors:

The manager is under no temptation to make children work six, eight, twelve hours a day. It would not profit him: he has no such work for them to do. Half an hours active work (if work it can be called), which may possibly involve a couple of hours attendance at the theatre, is all he requires of them. The manager... is directly interested in keeping his little troop physically fit. They must be bright, alert, and well-disposed if they are to do their work properly and please the public.<sup>64</sup>

This portrayal was useful in deflecting calls for theatrical children to be brought under the factory acts. Those who were reluctant or unable to acknowledge the true nature of theatrical work challenged any analogy drawn between industrial and theatrical work. Keen to disassociate theatrical employers from past criticisms leveled at earlier industrialists, pro-lobbyists claimed that it had been “proved in more than one public investigation that stage-children are well cared for bodily and mentally, revel in their work, and are the envy of their less fortunate comrades.”<sup>65</sup>

To quote from an 1883 statement it is clear that thinking on theatrical child labor had changed little throughout the NVA’s campaign:

Now let us see what are the advantages offered to these children of misery and starvation, of squalor and vice? They are taken in hand by kind-hearted matrons, appointed for the exclusive purpose of looking carefully after them; they are drilled some of them are taught to sing, some to dance... they are obliged to come to the theatre in a neat and cleanly condition, which obligation itself induces a general habit of orderliness and tidiness.<sup>66</sup>

This rationale prevailed and during the 1890s it was typically claimed that “in comparison to many other employments for children it [stage employment] seems to me to rank high—there is a great gulf between the little... dancer, and the haggard half-timer ‘doffing’ in the mill.”<sup>67</sup>

Although the passing of the Bill fell short of the NVA’s revised demands securing of the theatrical clause was the Association’s first positive achievement in its long campaign. The implementation of the licensing system was broadly seen as providing theatrical children with a protective safety net. However, given the propensity of theatrical employers to circumvent existing child laws, it is surprising that NVA members did not recognize that the industry would not limit its use of the license facility to isolated performances. The licensing amendment, pushed through so forcefully by Dunraven, was advantageous to theatrical employers in two ways. Firstly, its implementation appeased NVA supporters, which not only took pressure off employers but also took the theatrical child as laborer (its private persona) out of the spotlight. Secondly, it sanctioned the industry’s employment of a child labor force too young to legally work in any other industry.<sup>68</sup> Thus, conclusions drawn by others who argue that the legislation marked the end of widespread abuse and exploitation of child labor in the entertainment industry need, at very least, to be qualified.<sup>69</sup> Clearly the licensing system did imply a considerable change in the way in which children were recruited and retained for theatrical work. However, continuities persisted and must be incorporated into analysis of

the implications of the 1899 legislation for both commercially provided, performance-based leisure, and the performing child.

### THE LEGACY OF THE 1889 “CHILDREN’S CHARTER” FOR THE THEATRICAL CHILD

Consideration of the implementation of the theatrical clause of the Children’s Charter highlights a number of complexities that have to be included into any interpretation of its impact. The NVA hailed the Act as a triumph but the practical consequences of the Act were contingent and enforcement of the legislation was inadequate in most parts of the country.<sup>70</sup> Some of the courts issued the licenses carefully, in others the procedure was little more than a token.<sup>71</sup> Initial difficulties in the application of the Act persisted much longer than could have been anticipated. In part, the intentions of theatrical child law were compromised by ineffective administration. “The factory inspectors frequently paid visits to theatres when they received notice of the licensing of children and cases of the infringement of the conditions of the licences are noted from time to time in the reports of the Chief Inspector.”<sup>72</sup> But there were many flaws in the system of administration. “It is clear that in the great majority of cases the employers of children did not forward copies of the licences to the inspectors (if they troubled to obtain them at all).”<sup>73</sup> Until after the passing of the Act of 1894 the numbers of copies of licenses forwarded in any year never exceeded a hundred for the whole country. After 1894, it varied between 238 and 623. Inspectors were constantly complaining that notice of the licenses was received too late for any action (the law only required that notice should be sent by the person obtaining the license within *ten* days of its issue).<sup>74</sup> In 1894, the Home Office endeavored to remedy this to some extent in England and Wales by requesting the clerks to Justices of the Peace to forward copies of licenses to the local authorities as soon as they were issued. Further, the law merely laid upon the inspectors the duty of seeing that the conditions of the license were observed. It did not authorize them to interfere where licenses were not obtained at all. In such cases they could merely urge the local police authority to take appropriate action.

Problems were multiplied in the case of touring children. About seven years after the law had been introduced a report in *The Stage* confirms a situation of confusion and apathy:

There still appears to be some uncertainty regarding the legal employment on stage. On Monday Mr. James Perfect, Jun., manager of the Parkhurst applied

to Mr. Horace Smith to be allowed to employ two little colored children in a performance of Uncle Tom's Cabin to be given at his theatre, one of them being three years of age, the other an infant in arms. Mr. Smith suggested that no permission from him was necessary, as he did not see why children should not walk across the stage of a theatre in the charge of their mother. Mr Perfect explained that there was much difference of opinion of magistrates on the subject. The mother having been travelling all over the country in connection with the theatrical profession and on applying for permission to take her children on the stage it had as often been withheld as granted. Having referred to the Act, Mr. Smith decided that he had no power to grant the application, as the children were under seven, and the law, forbade that they should appear at any place of public entertainment "for profit." Some excuse may be made for actors and managers not always knowing the legal side of the stage question, but what about the magistrates?<sup>75</sup>

*The Stage* plainly laid the blame for the illegal use of theatrical child labor on those issuing the licenses. However, no single body can be held solely responsible for the obvious abuse of the law that left theatrical children unprotected. The children cited above were several years below the legal working age limit yet, by the mother's own admission, up to 50 percent of the magistrates she had applied to had sanctioned their labor. The refusal of half the applications made, suggests that the woman could not have been ignorant of the rules. Clearly, some parents were willing to circumvent the law in order to allow their offspring to earn. The testimony from an older chorus girl working at Drury Lane theatre also challenges arguments that if abuses and illegal employment did occur it was only in the lower or smaller theatres. Augustus Harris was one of the largest employers of children and was well respected yet he continued to employ children who were under the legal age to work. She reported, that the cast in her current production included "16 little girls aged from 6... who get 10s and half for 'day shows' or matinees."<sup>76</sup>

A common argument for the granting of a license was that permission had been granted by magistrates in previous towns visited. In 1898 for example, an application for a license for a boy of eight years of age to take part in a West-End production, brought the following response:

The child's part consisted of reciting about a hundred lines. He came on about 8pm and left about 10.30pm, arriving home at 10.50pm. Mr. Plowden thought it was too much to demand of a child of eight. Applicant explained that the boy had been playing the part for several months passed on tour, that he was well looked after, and that the piece was only to last for six nights. Mr. Plowden said he was of the opinion that no child so young should be employed so long in a

task so hard, but having regard to the fact that it was only for a week, and solely on that ground, he would grant the license asked for.<sup>77</sup>

A second magistrate expressed similar views. He “hardly approved of a child of such tender years [seven and a half] being on the stage late at night. Inspector Cheyney mentioned that the child had been performing for 12 months on licences granted in other districts. Mr. Marsham granted the licence, remarking that a little girl of this age ought to be in bed earlier.”<sup>78</sup>

It is difficult to determine the degree of sincerity behind the disapproving utterances of magistrates who then went on to grant licenses that sanctioned theatrical child labor. Lack of interest in touring children was influenced by the nomadic nature of their work. If theatrical children *were* seen as being problematic this was only a temporary state of affairs because each magistrate was only required to grant a license for a maximum of six days and “Some few magistrates and School Boards took a particular interest in the work of licensing theatre children.”<sup>79</sup>

Few magistrates evinced some reluctance to take any responsibility for the continued use of stage-children even though they held the power to prevent it. One seven-and-a-half-year-old girl was granted a license by a magistrate who then paradoxically remarked that “some time ago the *Era* commenced an onslaught on child actresses. Why is it so silent now?”<sup>80</sup> It seems remarkable that a magistrate who was reluctant to exercise his own power should criticize a theatrical trade journal for its inaction on the matter. This is particularly telling, given that this was stated about nine years after the passing of the CCP Bill and five years after the Bill’s 1894 amendment.

Weak implementation of the law did not go unnoticed. Theatrical children were still visible enough in number in 1896 for George Bernard Shaw to complain:

Sir Matthew White Ridley is currently receiving £5000 a year, partly at my expense, for looking after the administration of the laws regulating the employment of children. If a factory owner employed a child under the specified age, or kept a young person at work ten minutes after the specified hour, Sir Matthew would be down on him like five thousand ton of brick. If a factory was producing goods of vital utility and the rarest of artistic value, the plea would not be listened to for a moment. In the name of common sense why are speculators in club babies and the like to enjoy illegal and anti-social privileges which are denied to manufacturers? . . . I suggest to the Home Office that a rigid rule should be made against the licensing of children for any new entertainment whatsoever.<sup>81</sup>

Clearly, even the limited protection secured for children was being flouted by theatrical employers and many magistrates colluded in this.

Legal limitations on actual hours of work were equally compromised. The 1894 amendment to the PCC Act stated that child performers had to leave the theatre by 9 p.m. However, a clause gave discretionary powers to magistrates granting child licenses. This meant that the degree to which each child was protected depended upon an individual magistrate's interpretation of theatrical work. Young children who were granted a license could find themselves lawfully working for longer hours over longer periods than much older children in other trades. As noted above, the granting of a weekly license in each town had collectively permitted an eight-year-old boy to be employed six nights each week for several months. He did not leave the theatre until 10.30 p.m., and arrived home at 10.50 p.m.<sup>82</sup> Despite NVA satisfaction that as much as could be achieved had been achieved, the 1889 Act and its 1894 amendment may have made relatively little impact on the industry's ability to employ children. In 1896, an adult dancer employed at Drury Lane Theatre was still minded to reflect that she did not believe in "children coming on the stage so young. The little kids they look half dead by the time to go."<sup>83</sup>

This is not to say that children continued to be employed in the very high numbers that were typical during the 1880s. There is insufficient reliable data to support even speculative estimates of actual children in work during the 1890s and into the new century. However, a shift in the ways that employers were using children is evident, and this affected the number of children needed for individual productions. For example, Augustus Harris, who had pioneered the extravagant, spectacular pantomimes that demanded large numbers of children, in 1896 declared a change in approach, "[He] is now going to [aim] for perfection. No more troupe of ballet for him. Little and very good is to be his rule. A beginning has been made in Cinderella now on where he employs only 40 ballet girls."<sup>84</sup> Harris may, of course, have been responding to the inconvenience of licensing large numbers of children. Equally though, Crozier has shown that there was a change in fashion in dramatic productions and also in the ways that childhood was being represented on stage. By the end of the nineteenth century "the taste for child actors was less prominent than before."<sup>85</sup>

Nevertheless, in 1903 breadwinning theatrical children were still significant enough in number and in importance to the industry to again arouse public debate. This arose from a specific section of the Employment of Children Bill 1902/1903, which was intended to prevent children, in general, from working after 9 p.m. At first, the Government had no plans

to exempt theatre children from this law. However, the continued popularity and profitability of child performers prompted theatrical employers to contest this decision. As in 1889 a public campaign ensued although on this occasion this was instigated by the industry rather than any anti-theatrical body. Theatrical supporters adopted the same strategies used in 1889 in their agitation of 1903. Classical actress Ellaline Terriss summarized arguments typically offered by the industry:

For upwards of four years the theatre in which I act has employed children in every play we have produced their numbers varying from 20–80 at every performance. It is wrong to class these children under a Bill with Hawkers and judge the conditions under which they work with the child who earns a living in a factory. Sir it seems to me a duty that I should not allow the breadwinners of so many families to be thrown out of work by gentlemen who, however worthy their notions must be totally misinformed as to the real state of thing... the terms are so drastic that the movement becomes a double-edged sword, that will, while stopping the children workers happily on the one hand assist them to starve on the other... Actors support the employment of children... they earn a great deal of money through work which is to them play, and let this be thoroughly understood, play... single children have saved whole families this winter... Theatre is the greatest reforming influence street children can get... gives them friends in stations far above them in the way of position in another and higher class of society.<sup>86</sup>

John Gorst, Member of Parliament, countered these claims thus:

What was really asked for by the clause was that theatrical managers should be exempted from the provisions of the Bill, and that these young children should be deprived of the Protection... so far as London was concerned the employment of children was merely a question of money. London managers employed children because they were cheap. It was a question of cheap child labour.<sup>87</sup>

By the early 1900s, children had been prominent and popular on the stage for in excess of twenty years and had become accepted in their own right as a valuable part of performance-based entertainment. Their status meant that employers could now argue that restrictions on child performances would be a serious blow to dramatic art. The child's artistic value to drama was at the forefront of the industry's rationale in 1903, and providers of the legitimate drama headed the campaign. Henry Irving claimed that he employed children "purely for artistic reasons and not to save money. This is a point on which it is difficult to illuminate the minds of some legislators."<sup>88</sup>

The 1903 campaign differed from the 1889 agitation in that the main voices of opposition came from legislators.<sup>89</sup> Labouchere, who had been such a vigorous defender of theatrical child labor in 1889 was by 1903 siding with the opposite cause:

Theatrical managers had been representing the theatre as a sort of paradise for children; but as men of the world, Hon. Members knew that, that was not the case. The hours were often very long with two performances a day, from 2–11; with rehearsals, perhaps in addition. It was better to lay down a general law that children should not be allowed to work after 9 o'clock... All children under the age of fourteen were not permitted to work in factories after nine o'clock... why should the Home Secretary step in with a clause to protect and benefit theatres. Surely it is absurd to make that exception merely for the amusement of persons who went to the theatre.<sup>90</sup>

The exemption clause was also a concern for the Standing Committee on Trade; not in the least because it recognized the existing inadequate legal position of theatrical children. The Chairman of the Committee on Wage Earning Children argued that “the protection now afforded by the Education Acts and the Act of Prevention of Cruelty is not sufficient.” He expressed the hope that the statutory limitations of the Employment of Children Bill “will not be weakened in any way.”<sup>91</sup> However, although opposition to theatrical child labor in the Houses of Lords and Commons was more vocal in 1903 than in the previous campaign, its force was not enough to defeat the industry. The government allowed the section of the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act of 1894 dealing with theatrical children to be reenacted as part of the Employment of Children Act and thus enabled licensed children to be employed in theatres during child work hours, which were prohibited by the act and its bylaws. This decision illustrates the extent to which the industry still occupied the influential and powerful position that had previously secured itself a continuing child labor force.<sup>92</sup> That theatrical employers again sought and secured exemption from child law also indicates the importance of theatrical children to the industry’s economy. One Member of Parliament who was against stage-child employment was in no doubt of this. He claimed the revised law to be “a commercial clause-to get profit out of these young children.”<sup>93</sup>

The Government’s decision to allow the theatrical clause was accompanied by a move to raise the minimum age for theatrical child employment. The 1889 Prevention of Cruelty to Children Bill had set the lower limit for a licensed child at seven years. Much debate ensued. Ernest Gray MP argued that “it was absurd to say that children of seven were required

in theatres and it was monstrous that justices should ever have granted licenses to children of seven years."<sup>94</sup> The Home Secretary's initial intention to raise the minimum age by two years was the cause of much debate. John Burns MP believed that "manager's profits should not be advanced to the detriment of children of the immature age of seven or nine . . . even raising the age to nine is too low, it ought to be thirteen or fourteen at least."<sup>95</sup> However, as was the case with the 1889 CCP Bill, legislators were mindful not to sacrifice the whole Bill for the sake of issues concerning theatrical children. Even Ernest Gray expressed caution. "Any attempt to jump in advance of public opinion would ruin the object they had in view. They must be prepared to go step by step."<sup>96</sup> Home Secretary Mr. Akers Douglas made what he said was a "reasonable concession" and said he could go "no further than inserting an age limit minimum of ten instead of his request of nine."<sup>97</sup> Ultimately, in 1903 the minimum age at which a licensed theatrical child could lawfully work was set at ten years. This said, special dispensation was allowed for theatre children to work outside the hours of 9 p.m. and 6 a.m., which regulated child workers in other trades. This led one to describe the Act as of "no use . . . local authority by-laws could vary hours and permit employment for the convenience of theatre."<sup>98</sup>

Between 1889 and 1903 clauses in child protective legislation allowed the theatrical industry to legally retain a workforce of children, albeit not one as young as employers had hoped. However, this did not put an end to children under ten years unlawfully appearing on stage. In addition to licenses being wrongly issued, either accidentally or intentionally, alternative strategies were also used by those with an economic interest in theatrical children, which kept young performers on the boards. For example, in 1905, at age five, (half the legal age) lifelong performer Sandy Powell toured with his mother who had taught him to become a puppeteer:

Sandy worked on the stage manipulating a marionette figure, putting his head through the curtain on to the shoulders of the doll and bringing it to life by his skillful handling . . . Life at this time was certainly no bed of roses; there were hard times and these were too frequent to ensure a stable and secure living.<sup>99</sup>

After two years of working their act and being mutually financially dependent on each other, Powell's mother Lilly, secured a tour of small variety theatres in and around Manchester. It was in Manchester that a seven-year-old Sandy made his debut as a chorus singer. Being three years under the lawful age to apply for a license, Sandy was planted in the Gallery with the rest of the audience who were quite unaware of his connection to the

act on stage. "His part was to join in the choruses of Lilly's songs... Lilly hearing his voice... would look up and make a gesture for the audience to stop singing, and make signs at Sandy to stand up and continue singing... the audience loved his clear soprano voice."<sup>100</sup> The boy also appeared as a stooge for Dr. Walford Bodie who was "described as a 'mesmerist and Electrical Wizard.'" Bodie was one of the biggest draws of the day. "He claimed to alleviate suffering [and]... Cripples were brought to him in the hope of a cure, and often sticks and crutches were displayed in front of the theatre as proof of his remarkable 'cures.'" This allowed Sandy to earn without technically being employed. "For a few coppers each night he would 'volunteer' to go on stage and pretend to be mesmerised."<sup>101</sup>

For more than a decade the legislation of theatrical child labor continued to be governed by the 1903 Act.<sup>102</sup> In 1913/14, the question of theatrical child workers was raised again. Denman's Children's Bill proposed radical reorganization of employment and school attendance and included plans to further regulate the employment of children in theatres.<sup>103</sup> It is clear from the industry's reaction to this that children continued to occupy an important place within the theatrical workforce. The loudest public protestations came from those with vested theatrical interests. True to form, theatricals were keen to attract support from the public and quickly initiated letters to *The Times*. As Neil Daghish points out, public's "right" to see child performers was emphasized upon, although, in an otherwise supportive editorial, this argument was challenged by *The Times*. "The public have no right, to any benefit or pleasure which causes injury to those who provide it."<sup>104</sup> *The Times'* correspondence came exclusively from those at the top of the industry and covered arguments and topics that had originated in the 1880s. A vehicle for debate came in the form of child actress, Phyllis Bourke, then touring in John Galsworthy's new play *The Mob*, whose appearance in London was scheduled at the height of Denman's presentation of his Bill. An application for the child to be on stage up until 10:15 p.m. each night was rejected by a London Magistrate and this fueled the industry's demands for theatrical children to be exempted from the Bill.<sup>105</sup>

On that same tour Manchester Magistrates had allowed Bourke to perform until 11 p.m. This is indicative of the confusion and wide-ranging differences of interpretation of the laws designed to protect theatrical children.

Clearly, the sway of the industry was as dominant in 1914 as it had been in 1889. Public theatrical agitation aroused concern that plans to regulate theatre children might endanger the success of the whole of Denman's Bill.

This, led Denman to ask Galsworthy to dissuade any more of his friends from writing to the press because “he did not concede that the topic of theatre children was ‘complicated and difficult’ and sought Galsworthy’s response to the idea of ‘the law [concerning stage-children] remaining pretty much as it is but with an alteration allowing the LEA in the theatre child’s area of training...to possess the power of issuing licences which would be valid nationwide”<sup>106</sup>

Protests were not limited to letters to the press. Across the industry, theatrical bosses showed solidarity in the face of further regulation of their child employees. Theatre, music hall, and circus proprietors held meetings headed by prestigious theatrical figures such as Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree.<sup>107</sup> Denman, having first gained support from the Board of Education on their granting of national licenses, met with theatre and music hall representatives who agreed that this change would remove the problem of random interpretation of the law by “idiosyncratic magistrates.” The theatrical contingent who met with Denman represented production needs requiring some “5,000 children a year” a number which in itself indicates the continued popularity of child performers.<sup>108</sup> Their valued contribution to the financial success of a production is evident from the words of the president of the English Dramatists’ Club, Arthur Henry Jones who was representing 30 of the most prominent dramatists and authors. “It is pointed out that the profit on the most fortunate tour in the provinces can be converted into a serious loss by the prohibition of a performance in any one city. This prohibition can be effected in the case of a play in which a child under 14 appears, by refusal of the necessary licence by the local magistrate.”<sup>109</sup>

Notwithstanding a child’s sustained financial worth to both its family and employers, it is clear that the purpose of children on the pantomime stage was, as was the case in 1880, primarily aesthetic.<sup>110</sup> However Jones’s estimation of how restrictive legislation of child labor would impact on the dramatic theatre suggests that the contribution of children to the industry had become much more than stage decoration. One writer argued that the presence of children in a performance served to improve the well-being of boys and girls outside the theatre:

It is to be noted that the banishment of children from our stage shuts the door on much wholesome, popular domestic drama; the type of drama which appeals most effectively to the British people; the type of drama which we should be wise to encourage our masses to choose for their entertainment... the presence of children on the stage is important in the development of a serious

national drama. Nearly all our modern plays are concerned with marriage and marriage can scarcely be treated without more or less direct reference to children... [it is in] the interest of our successive generations of English children as a whole... as a powerful means of starting and stirring currents of social thought and action... many plays dealing with social abuses necessitate the presence of children on the stage. Vexatious restrictions on the appearance of children may do a great indirect injury to English children generally by choking the formation of a sound body of public opinion on matters that greatly concern their nurture and wellbeing.<sup>111</sup>

Such forceful arguments proved unnecessary. The industry's concerns were unwarranted because Denman failed to get his Bill passed. Thus, the legislation of 1903 remained intact and ten-year-old child laborers remained an accepted part of the theatrical workforce, up until 1918.

Although the 1918 Education Act raised the age at which unlicensed children could be employed in theatrical performances from 11 to 12 years, this section of the Act did not come into force until August 8, 1921.<sup>112</sup> Four years after Denman's proposal, the granting of licenses for children to take part in entertainments was taken from the jurisdiction of the courts and transferred to the Local Education Authority. In 1919, the President of the Board of Education appointed a Theatrical Children's Licences Committee to advise them on those rules that should be adhered to in the granting of licenses.<sup>113</sup> The Committee doubted if it would be possible for it to suggest licensing conditions that would allow children to remain in theatrical employment while also ensuring that their educational and welfare needs be kept within the parameters of the law. The Committee's conditions covered, regulated hours of employment, a recommendation of 12 weeks of holidays, limitation on matinees, the provision of health certificates, and the licensing of matrons in charge of child performers.<sup>114</sup>

Clearly, after a quarter of a century of active campaigning on their behalf, stage-children were still, for the most part, regarded in law and by those responsible for implementing the law as a special case. The cultural, economic, and social power of the theatrical industry was made visible in the extent to which attacks on its rights to use child labor were successfully resisted. However theatre owners and managers did not act alone. While they were directly able to gain the support of influential individuals at the highest levels of society their efforts to maintain the right to employ children were also bolstered from below. Those many thousands of ordinary people who made up theatre audiences that cut across class, age, and gender, the multitude of men and women who depended on the success of the theatrical industry for their livelihoods, the parents and guardians

of child performers, and even the children themselves all actively opposed any limitation on employers' rights to use child labor. Perhaps even more importantly they colluded in circumventing whatever limited protective legislation *was* introduced. As fashion and economic imperatives changed, the theatrical industry both led and responded to changes in the use of child labor. This reduced the need for stage-children and the industry adjusted its child labor force accordingly. Nevertheless, those children who remained in the industry were frequently as vulnerably situated as their predecessors and indeed their successors.<sup>115</sup>

## Conclusion

Between 1875 and 1914 the employment of theatrical child labor was crucial to the success of commercially provided performance-based leisure. The employment of child performers was at its height at a time when child labor was seen legislatively and socially as neither necessary nor desirable. The deduction is that this group of children were left outside the protective umbrella which covered other child workers because their labor was not recognized as such and/or because the work children rendered was regarded as more important than their individual needs. Prior to this study, the contribution of theatrical child labor to the theatrical economy and the implications of the same for those children has been largely overlooked by both theatre and childhood historians. As a consequence, a significant section of late Victorian child labor does not figure in the comprehensive studies that make up these two extensive historiographies. This work helps to address the consequences of omissions that compromise our full understanding of theatre and childhood history. The book also highlights a need for revision of some past conclusions, which have been reached without taking account of a substantial, late nineteenth-century child workforce across the nation.

These pages have established that theatrical entrepreneurs were both master of and servant to their public. Although the industry governed what its audiences eventually saw, this had to reflect contemporary society's tastes and interests. It has been shown that the rise of the entertainment industry also saw a growing cultural focus on childhood. A gradual acceptance of the specific rights and *needs* of children was accompanied by recognition of their particular *wants*. The former were reflected in legislative and philanthropic activities, whereas the latter were embedded in a commercialization of childhood that was linked to a sentimentalized cult of the child. Clearly, the timing of these developments was crucial in the fusing of two seemingly unconnected areas of study. Society's fixation with childhood was at its most comprehensive between 1875 and 1903 and coincided with the moment when the theatrical industry sustained a position

of central importance in the economy and within society. Commercially provided, performance-based leisure catered to a mass audience, which cut across class, age, and gender. Theatrical entrepreneurs realized their potential to develop, interpret, or invent popular childhood themes and convert them into revenue through nationwide venues and wide-ranging genres. Many of the child characters presented on stage symbolized the nation's aspirations for its future generation, and child labor was the catalyst required to bring these to life for the audience and to turn audience appreciation into theatrical profit.

The substantial contribution of theatrical child labor to the industry's success is clear from the evidence presented in this work. Unlike in most other industries, theatrical children were not cheap substitutes for adult labor. More importantly, there was no alternative labor that could effectively take the place of performing children who were, in their own right, essential to the industry. The value placed on theatrical children is visible in the strategies executed by employers to secure and sustain their labor. The use of binding contracts, and heavy investment in long-term apprenticeships and training, demonstrates the industry's need for skilled child workers. This confirms the key role of child labor within the theatrical workforce. Its value was reflected in the wage rates commanded by performing children. Even allowing for gradations within children's wages and setting aside the exceptional earnings of adult stars, childhood was the only time when performing wage rates exceeded those in comparative trades. In addition to paying above the going rate for child labor, employers were also prepared to increase the wages of children who were popular with audiences and therefore attracted larger crowds.

These already convincing arguments are supported by additional evidence showing that employers went to remarkable lengths to ensure continued access to child labor, on terms which suited the industry's needs over and above the needs of its child workers. Employers both evaded and flouted child-protection laws in ways that compromised the right of theatrical children to education and left them vulnerable to the misuse of their labor. In so doing, the theatre bosses drew on alliances with some of the nation's most powerful and influential figures and bodies—aliances that were forged and reciprocally reinforced in the context of the industry's key position in the economy and society. These practices flew in the face of prevailing notions of childhood and demonstrate the crucial importance of child workers to the industry. They also highlight the extent to which the needs of children could be sacrificed for the benefit of adults.

The question of how exploitation of such a visible workforce was accepted by a society fixated with childhood has been comprehensively addressed by showing the theatrical child to have had both a public and a private persona. Within its dual being, the child occupied a series of fluctuating identities each of which served the interests of a variety of *others*. The industry's ability to cater to the leisure needs of mass consumerism was made possible by a vast workforce that relied on the industry's success for its livelihood. Performers, backstage workers, and a multitude of satellite industries favored anything that stimulated the need for their services or goods. This shows the stage-child to have provided that stimulus with its ability to satisfy a wide range of audience viewing needs and its power, extended to the entertainment of all-child audiences, to engage a future generation of theatregoers.

Without doubt, the industry's reaction to the audience preference for watching performing children exposes its recognition of the stage-child's profitable potential. Its increased recruitment of theatrical child labor was a consequence of intensified output of child-themed and child-centered productions and the development of all-child companies. The constant and regular featuring of children in long-run productions and persistent promotion of child performers through extensive touring across the nation were not just artistically based decisions but calculated marketing strategies also for theatre's most saleable merchandise. This trade in childhood benefited a wide range of theatrical workers and suppliers who identified the theatrical child as a crucial element in contemporary mechanisms of supply and demand within the industry. To an audience, the same child had a distinctly different purpose and was viewed from a contrasting perspective steeped in the child's emotional worth and derived through the child's public persona and the host of characters it embodied on stage. Audiences were beguiled into seeing only the chimera of childhood. A passion to watch children perform unwittingly fueled the creation of a vast, workforce of children across the nation, whose labor went largely unprotected and often exploited.

The dual worth of the child as a source of profit for the industry and as a source of pleasure to the audience was matched by its importance as a family resource. The theatrical child as worker provided monetary reward while its role as performer brought emotional remuneration. The needs and wants of the theatrical child and its family were met by the benefits derived from both its private and public personas. Child-protective legislation had diminished the opportunities for children to undertake other paid employment, with no provision to make up for the deficit in the

family budget. Theatrical work offered a rare opportunity for children to earn and to contribute to the domestic economy. The theatrical child labor force was relatively classless, with some children *having* to work and others merely *wanting* to, and as such, the destination of and value placed on the child's wage depended upon the financial circumstances of its family. What all stage children experienced, however, was the adulation of the audience and an associated sense of self-worth and elevated status. Performing children became a source of pride for families, who reveled in this early form of celebrity.

The identities young performers inhabited in the public arena reinforced prevailing notions of childhood while hiding private realities. Not only were theatre children laborers when, at least in theory, they should have been scholars, their *job* was to satisfy the leisure needs of the public which meant they had to work while others were at play. This dictated unsociable work hours and late finishing times. The job was physically demanding, and backstage working conditions contrasted sharply with what was presented on stage. This said, the profession that confined the childhood of its young workers also held liberating potential.

The gendered nature of recruitment led to the emancipation of girl performers from their domestic duties at home. Although touring was physically challenging and a potentially dangerous activity, it offered a chance to those who might otherwise never have left the district they were born in, to travel all over the country and abroad. Theatrical children also came into close contact with and worked as part of a team with a wide range of people from all classes. These two possibilities offered child performers an education in life and opportunities not open to those children confined to the classroom. A lack of schooling was not a barrier to advancement in the field of performance. With talent, an uneducated child from the poorest of families could reach the pinnacle of the profession and achieve social mobility. The pool of child labor always exceeded the industry's needs; therefore relative to the numbers seeking work, few achieved adult stardom, although for many, the industry continued to provide a living wage into adulthood. For countless others stage careers ended the moment the child ceased to be of value to the industry.

Satisfying all the above needs compromised the theatrical child's experience of childhood. Those deriving some sort of return from the children's work were unwilling or unable to acknowledge their vulnerability. Moreover, the minority group that did express concern over the effect of theatrical work on children also recognized the value of child labor to the industry. As a consequence, although theatrical children could benefit

from calls on their behalf for protection, some campaigners also used the value placed on the theatrical child as leverage to satisfy their own broader ends. At the core of the NVA's campaign was a deep-seated disapproval of the perceived immorality of commercially produced, performance-based leisure. Targeting of the much prized theatrical child struck at the heart of the Victorian entertainment business and guaranteed Millicent Fawcett and NVA supporters a public platform from which they could attack the industry. However, campaigners had underestimated the power of theatrical interests and the depth of support they were able to draw upon.

Benjamin Waugh and fellow champions of children's rights nevertheless recognized the particular value of the theatrical child as a bargaining tool. While the NVA used the trope of the laboring child against the industry, Waugh and his supporters, understanding the futility of direct confrontation with theatrical interests and anxious to secure the passage of the CCCP Bill into law, prioritized theatrical employers' needs over those of their child employees. In so doing, the NSPCC sacrificed the interests of those children who were most vulnerable under existing laws, effectively excluding them from new protective legislation. This strategy was rationalized by reference to the welfare of children across wider society, but significantly ensured Waugh and fellow campaigners the tools they sought to pursue their own professional and political agenda. This is not to devalue the Society's achievement in securing such radical legislation. The pragmatism demonstrated in the strategy pursued does, though, offer further evidence of the influential position of theatrical interests in Victorian society and of the perceived crucial contribution of stage children to the industry's continued prosperity.

With theatrical child labor left largely outside the protective laws and parties with vested interest willing to circumvent what little protection did exist, it was philanthropic endeavor that provided theatrical children with a safety net. More than 20 years before the passing of the CCCP Bill, theatrical missionaries had steadfastly offered support to young performers. This long-term close association with theatrical children had informed a clear understanding of their needs and the problems they faced. Missionaries recognized how widely valuable child labor was and thought that attempts to try to end its use would be futile, and in any case, not altogether necessary. Hence, they offered practical services that aimed to meet the perceived needs of children working in theatres. It must also be noted, though, that by alleviating some of the hardships of theatrical work, theatrical missionaries helped to perpetuate the continued employment of theatrical child labor.

The help offered by such missionaries as Ellen Barlee was not completely altruistic. Their evangelical commitment embraced theatricals in the hope that while ameliorating some of the hardships associated with the work, their good example and counselling would bring the children to Christianity. Although missionaries did not view theatrical venues as a fitting environment for children, they believed that by ensuring children were spiritually pure they would be impervious to unsavory and immoral temptations in the workplace and likely to choose alternative modes of employment. This said, throughout almost 30 years of debate, theatrical missionaries provided more practical help for theatrical employees, than any other body. This significant contribution to the welfare of stage children has, before now, gone unacknowledged because previous studies have documented Ellen Barlee's missionary involvement with stage children, in conjunction with the NVA's campaign. This approach is flawed because Barlee and Fawcett held many opposing views on performing children and adopted different methods to confront what each recognized as problems arising from theatrical employment.

Past studies have suggested that after 1894, the raising of the minimum age limit and the introduction of licensing combined to resolve the contentious issue of theatrical child labor. The NVA campaign has been credited with having brought about these advances. This work challenges the view that the NVA's campaign and protective legislation were the chief factors in the demise of theatrical child labor. Although the NVA was instrumental in bringing debates about theatrical children into the public arena, its campaign to end the employment of theatrical children fell short of its goal and achieved only modest success.

Moreover, although previous research *has* acknowledged that a minority of children may have slipped through the net and continued to be unlawfully employed after legislation, this has done nothing to undermine the consensus view that NVA campaigners initiated the demise of theatrical child employment. Further, earlier interpretations concluded that, for the most part, reduced demand, consequent on the improved legal protection, addressed earlier abuses. Indicative new evidence presented here, though, has made it clear that regulatory improvements benefited the industry more than its child employees. Long after NVA involvement had ended, the unlawful employment of theatrical child labor persisted at a level far greater than has previously been suggested. New evidence has shown how nineteenth-century patterns of theatrical child work and evasion of child laws were still prevalent in the late 1930s and beyond and suggests that performance-based child labor remained and, indeed, continues to be susceptible to abuse.

Regardless of the limitations placed upon the use of child labor, the influential position of the industry and its network of powerful support ensured for theatrical employers the continued use of theatrical children on terms to suit the industry's needs. Those needs did change, but although legislation could inconvenience employers, it was the simple law of supply and demand that governed a reduction in the industry's labor force of children. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the content and modes of theatrical production shifted. The staging of more modest presentations called for smaller casts and this coupled with a change in the way children were presented on stage meant that the industry required fewer children. In essence, the inclusion of children in a production became less about representations of children and flamboyant celebrations of childhood and more about their general and everyday interaction in society. By the 1900s the theatrical child, in the eyes of the industry, had simply exhausted its emotional and economic worth. Nevertheless, the smaller numbers employed were still seen as essential to the industry. Notably, although labor was secured over and above the interests of the child labor force, employers, parents, and unwittingly, the children themselves actively colluded in ensuring supply met demand. Those responsible for implementing the law often by choice, neglect, or ignorance contributed to evasion and ensured the continued exploitation of individual child performers. These children were made more vulnerable by the general belief that their situation had been addressed and was no longer a source of concern.

In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, two distinct phenomena—the development of the vast, economically and culturally significant, performance-based leisure industry and the emergence of the emotionally valued, sentimentalized cult of the child—were brought together and became mutually reinforcing. This study has focused on the reciprocal relationship between the theatre industry's output and success and an ideologically idealized image of childhood that it both drew on and contributed to. The representations of childhood that emerged from this symbiosis fueled the aspirations of an increasingly child-focused society, concerned to protect these vulnerable waifs, while compromising the welfare of the real children working on the stage. Historical periodization can, however, mask continuities and changes that preexist and/or persist beyond the historical moment focused upon. Further research needs to be undertaken beyond the confines of the period, frameworks, and questions that inform this study.

# Notes

## INTRODUCTION

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## 1 RAW MATERIAL, LABOR, AND THE FINISHED PRODUCT: THE THEATRICAL CHILD AS EMPLOYEE

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32. Wilson, *The Story of Pantomime*, 89.
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90. *The Stage*, January 8, 1886.
91. “A Peep behind the Scenes.” See also “Children and the Theatre,” *The Stage*, November 16, 1888.
92. For many examples of training institutions see *The Theatricals: The Music and Dramatic Gazette*, January 4, 1894; *The Interlude*, January 2, 1886.
93. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 52.
94. H. G. Hibbert, *Fifty Years of a Londoner’s Life* (London: Grant Richards, 1916), 104.
95. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 52. On inspection of a prospectus for the National Training School of Dancing, Cyril Beaumont found the capacity for enrolment numbers to be 200 pupils. C. W. Beaumont, “Our First National School of Dancing,” *The Dancing Times*, August 1967, 589.
96. The business interests of some theatrical producers overlapped with subsidiary supply. For example managers’ and actor managers’ were often patrons of the larger training establishments such as London’s Dramatic Studio. See *The Theatricals: The Musical and Dramatic Gazette*, January 25, 1894.

97. M. Fawcett, "Theatre and Pantomime Children," *The Vigilance Record*, 1885.
98. "The Fairies of the Stage."
99. M. Fawcett, *Third Report* (Education), 305.
100. Hibbert, *Fifty Years*, 108.
101. For examples of the legal enforcement of contracts, sought through the courts see *The Times*, November 23, 1889; August 6, 1890; January 12, 1893; July 5, 1899.
102. Fawcett, "Theatre and Pantomime Children."
103. L. Carnac, "The Training of a Dancer," *Pearson's Magazine*, 1897, vol. IV, 14. See also *The Stage*, May 10, 1889, 204–205.
104. Fawcett, *Third Report* (Education), 305. For example, education laws did not concern the under-fives as it was not envisaged that industrial employers would call for the labor of a child so young; yet to the entertainment industry children of such tender years proved to be a profitable asset. Therefore theatrical employers were within the law when they employed children under school age. Theatre managers were also able to engage school age children by claiming exemption from the 1876 Education Act, which defined exceptions to the rule by allowing, "such employment during which school is not open, or otherwise does not interfere with the efficient elementary instruction of such child; and that the child obtains such instruction by regular attendances for full time at a certified school, or in some other efficient manner." (Fawcett, *Third Report* (Education), 305–320).
105. Fawcett for instance referring to one such back-stage school claimed that, "Between 150 and 200 children were employed by Mr. Harris. On inspection of his school room though only fifteen children were present and only twenty three were on the school roll." (M. Fawcett, "The Employment of Children in Theatres," *The Contemporary Review*, December 1889, 829).
106. W. Mitchell, *Rescue the Children or Twelve Years Dealing with Neglected Boys and Girls* (London: Isbister, 1886), 70. See also Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 77. "The Fairies of the Stage"; Dolman, "Stage Children," 177; "Pantomime Children."
107. *The Stage*, November 16, 1888.
108. *The Stage*, January 8, 1886.
109. A. Davin, *Growing up Poor* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1996), 11. See also E. Ross, *Love & Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London 1870–1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
110. *The Stage*, May 24, 1889.
111. "The Employment of Children," *The Music Hall*, June 20, 1889. This was the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act which stated children under ten years of age "will be prohibited from performing in theatres, music halls, temperance halls, booths, shows, fairs and any other places of entertainment." This article states that there was nothing to prevent Katti Lanner from teaching dancing to children of two years of age so long as they did

- not appear in public before they were ten. Also, “gymnasts could continue to endure arduous training day after day until the child reaches 10 years and can be set to work.”
112. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 49. One of the largest providers of children advertised its services thus, “The National Training School For Dancing offers decided advantages to the Managers in making their arrangements. Its pupils can be arranged singly or in any number required, the terms being liberal, whilst the highest efficiency is guaranteed.” (The advertisement then lists a large number of its theatrical success at numerous high profile venues, in Britain and abroad which, it was claimed, spoke for themselves or), “render comment futile.” [*The Era Almanac (Era Annual) Dramatic and Musical* (London: E. Ledger, 1881–1882)].
  113. For instance one proprietor stated that “troupes are paid as a whole and they will make anywhere from twenty five pounds a week upwards as they take the public taste.” (Carnac, “The Training,” 205).
  114. “Some lessons are as cheap as 1/- per lesson up to 5/- per lesson.” (Interview with dancer, Fanny Laughton, Charles Booth Archive, Survey Notebooks, B156, January 2, 1896, 13–32, 20).
  115. For the origins of The National Training School of Dancing see H. Rosenthal, ed., *The Mapleson Memoirs* (London: Putnam, 1966).
  116. I. Guest, *The Empire Ballet* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1962), 19.
  117. In one production Guest shows that, “Lanner arranged a variety of dances introducing some of her child pupils in the Hyde Park scene. This ballet proved so popular that a new edition was produced in January 1900, and was not taken off until the two editions together had run for well over a year.” (Guest, *The Empire Ballet*, 55).
  118. *The Professional World*, February 1893. McLaughlin also acted as a theatrical agent to the children. She introduced pupils to the profession, “several of which were doing very well.” Similarly, by 1894 Miss Upham is shown to have successfully carried on her business of providing companies of juveniles to many and varied venues, for over 15 years (*The Theatricals: The Musical and Dramatic Gazette*, January 4, 1894). Another large and very successful long established establishment was Madame Phasey of the, “Anglo-Italian Training School of Stage Dancing and Singing.” This and many more can be found listed in the pages of, *The Theatricals: The Musical and Dramatic Gazette’s* extensive record of training establishments. Academies also helped to establish performing as a profession by “awarding gold, silver, bronze medals to pupils for examinations.” (*The Professional World*, February 1893).
  119. Mitchell, *Rescue the Children*, 70.
  120. Mrs. Jeune, “Children in Theatres,” *English Illustrated Magazine*, October 1889. Mrs. Jeune also details several other male individuals who earned their living from trading in theatrical child labor. Also an interview with Paul

- Valentine, who ran a successful business at the English School for Dancing, a Theatrical and Musical Academy, appeared in, Levin Carnac, "The Training," see also *The Stage*, May 10, 1889; *The Theatricals: The Musical and Dramatic Gazette*, January 4, 1894.
121. *The Professional World*, March 1892.
  122. Agents' advertisements for children can be found in many contemporary journals. See for example, *The Dramatic Recorder and Theatrical Advertiser*, September 1874.
  123. *The Lady's Pictorial*, January 1, 1884.
  124. J. M. Weylland, *The Man with the Book: Or the Bible among the People* (London: Partridge, 1878), 95.
  125. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 99.
  126. See Dolman, "Stage Children," 177–185, Crozier's study provides a useful and detailed account of the main characters portrayed by children in British theatres between 1880 and 1905. Crozier, "Notions."
  127. "Pantomime Children."
  128. P. Bedells, *My Dancing Days* (London: Phoenix House, 1954), 20–21.
  129. *The Professional World*, March 1893. For instance as an aspiring young actress, Italia Conti (later famed for her own theatrical school), gained her first acting role via an introduction to an eminent theatre manager by Ellen Terry of the distinguished acting dynasty. See *The Green Room Book, British and Irish Biographies 1840–1940* (Number 6 of 6) (London: Chadwick and Healey, 1906). According to Carol Mavors, "it was through Terry that Carroll supported many girl actresses." [C. Mavors, *Pleasure Taken: Performances of Sexuality and Loss in Victorian Photographs* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996), 134].
  130. *The Variety Stage*, July 1892.
  131. "Young Garnet Vayne was, the youngest of quite a family of little players; there are Isla who has played the child in 'East Lynne' on three provincial tours; Fay, whose stage experience has extended as far as South Africa; and Errol, whose most successful performance has been Dick the waif in, 'Human Nature.'" (Dolman, "Stage Children," 79).
  132. *The Playgoer*, March 1889.
  133. Examples of publicity and promotion include Baby Creighton, billed as a "wonderful performer for 5 years old." This young girl's previous successes are listed as those of Little Artie, a girl of six (*The Stage*, January 6, 1888). Another seasoned performer was Miss Maggie Morton who it was claimed already had nine years of touring behind her (*The Stage*, January 13, 1888). See also *The Amusing Journal*, May 25, 1895. Also, L. Wagner, *How to Get on Stage and Succeed There* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1899), 175.
  134. M. Tindal, "Baby Actors," *Pearson's Magazine*, June 1897, vol. III, 683.
  135. *The Professional World*, June 1893. See also *The Professional World*, March 1892 and 1893. For evidence of the extensive employment and increasing demand for two young sisters, Edith and Dora Tullock.

136. Carnac, "The Training," 205.
137. A. Fryers, "Infant Prodigies," *Pearson's Magazine*, January 1899, vol. VII.
138. Dolman, "Stage Children," 178.
139. *Music Hall Artists Association Gazette*, February 23, 1887.
140. *The Playgoer*, March 1889.
141. T. C. Davis, *Actresses as Working Women Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), 35.
142. See J. C. M. D'Eleppington, *The National Review*, XVII, 1891, 261.
143. According to one large employer of theatrical children, his touring children received about "24s a week, some of them 18s... out of which they had to pay a percentage to Madame Lanner, who trained them; others who were not trained did not get as much." (*The Times*, May 18, 1889).
144. Davis, *Actresses*, 35.
145. E. F. Hogg, "School Children as Wage Earners," *Nineteenth Century*, August 1897. It is worth noting that Hogg makes no mention of theatrical child workers in her study.
146. "Children in Pantomime," *The Stage*, December 7, 1883. In 1884, Barlee claimed that even, "Little supers earn 1s a night." (Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 26). Rates had risen in 1885 to between 6d and 1s for each performance. Main featured roles gleaned between 4 and 5s each evening ("The Fairies of the Stage").
147. "A Peep behind the Scenes." Ivor Guest reiterates these rates when writing on the sums dancers could expect when engaged at the Empire theatre during the 1890s. "Children used to receive one or two shillings a performance, and senior pupils from £4 to £8 a month, while dancers in the house ballet could expect to receive from £12 to £18 a month if they merely had a pretty face and a good figure, from £20 to £25 if they possessed some talent in addition, and more if they undertook roles." (Guest, *The Empire Ballet*, 38).
148. Davis, *Actresses*, 33.
149. Davis, *Actresses*, 33.
150. Jackson, *The Victorian Theatre*, 140.
151. Letter to *The Stage* from Mr. John Tebbut father of principal actor in D'Oyly Carte's all child touring company, *The Stage*, July 26, 1899.
152. Davis, *Actresses*, 33. Davis shows that, "As they became more experienced child pantomime supers could earn up to 8s a week at Drury Lane or 3s at minor theatres and between £1 and £3 for chief parts at Drury Lane, or 10 to 20s at the minors."
153. Carnac, "The Training," 205. Carnac's article shows that for children attached to dancing academies wage increases were subject to contract clauses. Contracts could last into adulthood. One clause for example prohibited girls from getting married when they were older. The promise of future monetary rewards were persuasive arguments for compliance. Coryphées earned £2 upwards until they took principal parts. Principals could expect £15 per week rising to 25 or 30 pounds a week.

154. *The Era*, December 16, 1877. A letter supporting this claim, from another ballet girl appeared in the same paper one week later on December 23, See also Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 52.
155. "Notes on the Theatrical Mission and Institute," January 27, 1896; Charles Booth Archive, Survey Notebooks, B156, 137–142, 141).
156. *The Times*, July 5, 1899.
157. *The Times*, September 8, 1879.
158. Dolman, "Stage Children," 182. Also "Next to the ballet the greatest attraction is the infant cowboy shooter. Master Vivienne Cody... aged ten years." ("On Music Hall," *The Variety Stage*, June 1892). "Seven year old Rose Rendell specialty and transformation dancer now nine for last two years has performed all over England Scotland and Wales Rose trained with Signor Albertini [late principal dancer] and is much in demand and touring." (*The Amusing Journal*, May 4, 1895).
159. Carnac, "The Training," 205.
160. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 54. Gertrude Tuckwell echoed Barlee's claim some ten years later when she noted that "An infant phenomenon who happens to be just the thing required for a certain part will gain £1 a week or more," G. M. Tuckwell, *The State and Its Children* (London: Methuen, 1894), 122.
161. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 56.
162. *The Circulator*, January 7, 1882.
163. "Pantomime Children."
164. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 24.

## 2 LABORING FAIRIES: THE THEATRICAL CHILD AS A FAMILY RESOURCE AND A RESOURCEFUL CHILD

1. Cunningham suggests that between the years 1880 and 1914, Britain witnessed an end to child employment. See H. Cunningham, "Combating Child Labor: the British Experience," in *Child in Labor in Historical Perspective, 1800–1985*, ed. H. Cunningham and P. P. Viazzo (Florence: UNICEF, International Child Development Care, 1996). Lavalette makes the case that child labor continued during and after this period but the labor of children was restructured and marginalized. M. Lavalette, *A Thing of The Past? Child Labor in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999).
2. See for example, I. Pinchbeck and M. Hewitt, *Children in English Society, Volume II, From the Eighteenth Century to the Children's Act 1948* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973); G. K. Behlmer, *Child Abuse and Moral Reform in England 1870–1908* (California: Stanford University Press, 1982); E. Hopkins, *Childhood Transformed Working-Class Children in Nineteenth Century England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

3. J. Walvin, *A Child's World: A Social History of English Childhood 1800–1914* (London: Penguin Books, 1982, 77).
4. M. Lavalette, "The Changing form of Child Labor circa 1880–1918: The Growth of Out of School Work," in *A Thing of the Past? Child Labor in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. M. Lavalette (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 124.
5. The general age range of theatrical children was between three and fifteen years, although, children as young as 18 months were also engaged. See W. Mitchell, *Rescue the Children, Or Twelve Years Dealing with Neglected Boys and Girls* (London: Isbister, 1886), 70; E. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs; Or, a Plea for Our City Children* (London: S.W. Partridge & Co, 1884), 59 and 70; Fawcett, *Elementary education acts. Third report of the Royal Commission appointed to inquire into the working of the elementary education acts, England and Wales*. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1887, 307. However, after 1889 the legal minimum age a child could work on stage after obtaining a license, was seven years rising to ten years after 1903.
6. *The Times*, May 18, 1889.
7. *The Times*, September 8, 1879.
8. An approximation of numbers can be found in, Third Report on the Royal Commission of Education Parliamentary Papers, 1887, XXX. Minutes of Evidence, Cardinal Manning, question number 50468 Millicent Fawcett, answer number 50469, 308; T. C. Davis, "The Employment of Children in the Victorian Theatre," *New Theatre Quarterly*, 2, (1986): 117; "Children in Theatres," *The Times*, July 16, 1887; Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 8; "Child Workers in London," G. Newnes, *The Strand Magazine* (London: George Newnes, 1884), January–June 11, 501–511.
9. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 90.
10. Anon, "The Fairies of the Stage," *The Pall Mall Gazette*, February 9, 1885.
11. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 87–88.
12. For the argument that the industry required young children for artistic purposes see "The Theatre Philanthropic cruelty—'Phyllis'—Forgotten," *The World*, July 10, 1889. Millicent Fawcett claimed that, "Children are known who have been on the stage since they were three or four years old, who have constant engagements night after night." (Mrs Henry Fawcett "Theatre and Pantomime Children," *The Vigilance Record*, London: National Vigilance Association, n.d. (1885), 1–3).
13. On the contribution of children's paid and unpaid work see A. Davin, *Growing Up Poor: Home, School and Streets in London, 1870–1914* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1996), Chapters 9 and 10. On contribution of child wages to household income, see E. Ross, *Love and Toil. Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 158–162.
14. Whitechapel, as depicted by Judith Walkowitz, was typical of neighbourhoods which fed the industry's need for child labor. "By the 1880s Whitechapel had become to epitomize the social ills of 'Outcast London,'

- casual and seasonal unemployment, starvation wages, overcrowding and exploitative rents, an inhumane system of poor relief, declining traditional industries and an increase in 'sweated' labor were all marked features of living and working conditions there." (J. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight* (London: Virago, 1992), 82. See also, A. Bear, Letter to *The Times*, February 9, 1889. On London and poverty see H. J. Dyos, "The Slums of Victorian London," in *Exploring the Urban Past: Essays in Urban History*, ed. D. Cannadine and D. Reeder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1982; Ross, *Love*, 11–15; On the contingency of living standards in late nineteenth century London see Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, 21–27; S. Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).
15. Anon, "The Fairies of the Stage."
  16. T. C. Davis, *Actresses as Working Women Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), 32–33.
  17. Mrs Jeune, "Children in Theatres," *English Illustrated Magazine*, October 1889.
  18. M. Fawcett, "The Employment of Children in Theatres," *The Times*, February 9, 1889.
  19. As one commentator noted that "the mites are engaged only at certain seasons; and their harvest-time enables poor people to obtain many little comforts and necessaries." J. Runciman, ed. "Stage Children," *Side Lights: The Family Herald* (London: Fisher Unwin), 1893, XIV, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/15762/15762-h/15762-h.htm>.
  20. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 186–189. This view of theatrical children is in direct contrast to the portrayal of theatrical child employees as passive victims as presented by NVA supporters.
  21. Mrs Henry Fawcett, The Employment of Children in Theatres, *National Vigilance Record*, London: National Vigilance Association, n.d. [post 1885].
  22. "An Interview with Miss Alice Leama," *The Amusing Journal*, March 16, 1895.
  23. See *The London Echo*, December 12, 1888; *The Times*, February 5, 1889.
  24. Runciman, "Stage-Children," XIV.
  25. Mitchell, *Rescue the Children*, 60.
  26. Augustus Harris claimed that his child workforce was "taken from the lower classes and the lower middle classes. The parents were generally most respectable people." (*The Times*, May 18, 1889.)
  27. G. M. Tuckwell, *The State and its Children* (London: Methuen, 1894), 120.
  28. "Musical and Dramatic Notes," *The Malvern and Looker On*, October 1, 1890.
  29. "Mrs. Kendal on the Actor's Status," in *The Victorian Theatre: A New Mermaid Background Book*, ed. R. Jackson (London: A&C Black, 1989), 131.
  30. I. Vanbrugh, *To Tell My Story* (London: Hutchinson, 1948), 20.
  31. H. Gingold, *How to Grow Old Disgracefully* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1989), 31.

32. A. E. Wilson, *The Story of Pantomime* (London: E.P. Publishing Ltd., 1974), 93–94.
33. *The Stage*, January 20, 1888.
34. *The Stage*, December 7, 1883.
35. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 77.
36. “An Interview with Miss Marion,” *The Amusing Journal*, February 9, 1895.
37. Vanbrugh, *To Tell*, 141–142.
38. “An Interview with Miss Marion Keates.”
39. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 55.
40. “Children in Pantomime,” *The Stage*, December 7, 1883.
41. “Pantomime Children,” *The Stage*, January 8, 1886.
42. *The Times*, May 18, 1889.
43. “An Interview with Miss Marion Keates.”
44. “An Interview with Florrie Robina,” *The Amusing Journal*, May 25, 1895.
45. F. Dolman, “Stage Children, Leading Little Actors and Actresses of the Day,” *The English Illustrated Magazine*, XXI, May, 1899, 177.
46. “Stage Slaves,” *Justice*, February 16 1889.
47. “A Peep Behind The Scenes,” *The Sketch*, February 12, 1896.
48. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 7.
49. *Amusing Journal*, March 16, 1895.
50. *The Stage*, December 7, 1883.
51. R. Jackson, *The Victorian Theatre: A New Mermaid Background Book* (London: A&C Black, 1989), 131.
52. *The Theatre*, February 1897.
53. Tindal, “Baby,” 679.
54. Dolman, “Stage Children,” 180.
55. The work offered the freedom to broaden the horizons of middle-class girls and for them to take paid engagements abroad. The Valli sisters went with the “Morocco Bound” company on a tour of Germany and Holland (Dolman, “Stage Children,” 180).
56. Dolman, “Stage Children,” 182.
57. Shani D. Cruze provides detailed analysis of the popularity of amateur dramatic amongst middle-class women and the benefits they derived from engaging in amateur productions. See Shani D. Cruze “Dainty Little Fairies: women, gender and the Savoy Operas,” *Women’s History Review*, 9, 2 (2000), 345–368. See also L. Abrams and K. Hunt, “Borders and Frontiers in Women’s History,” *Women’s History Review*, 9, 2, (2000), 191–200, 196.
58. Vanbrugh, *To Tell*, 12–13.
59. Vanbrugh, *To Tell*, 13.
60. Dolman, “Stage Children,” 182.
61. Davis, *Actresses as Working Women*, 13.
62. Gingold, *How to Grow Old Disgracefully*, 30.
63. P. Bedells, *My Dancing Days* (London: Phoenix House, 1954), 24

64. Lowndes, "The Little."
65. *The Illustrated Police News*, February 13, 1886, 3
66. A. V. John, *Elizabeth Robins: Staging a Life, 1862–1952* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 28.
67. *The Amusing Journal*, February 9, 1895.
68. Mitchell, *Rescue the Children*, 69–70.
69. "Pantomime Children."
70. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 188.
71. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 74–75.
72. Anon, "The Fairies of the Stage." Also, Bear, letter to *The Times*.
73. Anon, "The Fairies of the Stage."
74. Davies, *Actresses as Working Women*, 98.
75. Vanbrugh, *To Tell*, 86. See also Bedells, *My Dancing*, 17.
76. Our Ladies' Column. Penelope. *Leicester Chronicle and the Leicestershire Mercury*, April 14, 1888.
77. Jackson, *Victorian Theatre*, 249.
78. *The Stage*, December 14, 1888.
79. "Illustrated Interviews," No. VI—Sir Augustus Harris, *The Strand Magazine*, December 1891.
80. *The Sketch*, February 12, 1896.
81. C. Morris, *Stage Confidences* (London: Charles. H. Kelly, 1902.)
82. "Pantomime Children."
83. Helen Cresswell, "My Child Actor," *The Era Almanack*, 1887, 84.
84. *The Times*, July 5, 1899.
85. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 78.
86. M. Fawcett. "The Employment of Children in Theatres," *The Contemporary Review*, December 1889, 822–829, 825.
87. See also *The Play*, January 3, 1884.
88. Jackson, *Victorian Theatre*, 252. See also *The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, 1874.
89. "Pantomime Children."
90. "Pantomime Children."
91. Vanbrugh, *To Tell*, 91.
92. *The Prompter*, March 1, 1889.
93. *The Theatrical Times*, April 19, 1894. See also, Davis, "The Employment," 126.
94. Barlee, *Pantomime*, 86.
95. Anon, "The Fairies of the Stage."
96. *The Sketch*, February 12, 1896.
97. "Children in Pantomimes."
98. "Children in Pantomimes."
99. Guest's claim that although there were a few performers who were middle-class many of Lanner's dancers came from lower class families suggests the majority of her charges could ill afford the risk of a fine. See Guest, *Ballet*, 37.

100. The popularity among Victorian audiences of fairy themes is explored in Chapter 4.
101. Barlee, *Pantomime*, 53.
102. Barlee, *Pantomime*, 53–54.
103. Barlee, *Pantomime*, 80–83.
104. Anon, “The Fairies of the Stage.”
105. Barlee, *Pantomime*, 80–83.
106. *The Play*, January 3, 1884.
107. Barlee, *Pantomime*, 78.
108. Barlee, *Pantomime*, 79.
109. P. Fisher, *In Dangerous Paths* (London: Theatrical Mission Booklets, 1883), 23–24.
110. John Matthias Weylland, *The Man with the Book: Or, the Bible Among the People* (London: S. W. Partridge & Co., 1878), 96–97.
111. *The Sketch*, March 15, 1893. The popularity of animal representation stimulated a subsidiary industry of suppliers of animal skins. See for example, *The Interlude*, January 2, 1886.
112. Barlee, *Pantomime*, 95.
113. Barlee, *Pantomime*, 95.
114. “An Interview with Charles Lauri,” *The Sketch*, March 15, 1893.
115. Weylland, *The Man with the Book*, 96–97
116. “An Interview with Charles Lauri,” *The Sketch*, March 15, 1893.
117. Barlee, *Pantomime*, 95.
118. Weylland, *The Man with the Book*, 96–97.
119. See illustration entitled “Preparing for the Pantomime,” in “Illustrated Interviews,” No. VI—Sir Augustus Harris, *The Strand Magazine*, December 1891.
120. “What a Ballet Costs—A Peep behind the Scenes,” *The Sketch*, February 12, 1896.
121. “Pantomime Children.”
122. “Pantomime Children.”
123. Wilson, *The Story of Pantomime*.
124. “Pantomime Children.”; See also “Pantomime Masks and Properties,” *Strand Magazine*, July 1894, 662.
125. “Pantomime Children.”
126. Contracts invariably favored the employer. Whereas children were usually contracted not to work for any other employer employers were not bound to find them work. See for example, *The Times*, August 6, 1890; January 12, 1893; July 5, 1899.
127. Letters to *The Era*, December 16 and 23, 1877.
128. E. Craig and C. St. John (eds.), *Ellen Terry's Memoirs* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1932), 14.

129. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 74–75.
130. *The Times*, December 29, 1904.
131. *The Play*, January 3, 1884.
132. *The Times*, August 6, 1889.
133. *The Vigilance Record*, 1885.
134. “Children and the Theatre.”
135. *The Times*, May 18, 1889.
136. *The Times*, May 18, 1889.
137. Craig and St. John, *Ellen*, 55.
138. Davis, “The Employment of Children,” 127.
139. *The Playgoer*, March 1889.
140. Tuckwell, *The State*, 125.
141. *The Play*, January 3, 1884.
142. *The Times*, December 27, 1881.
143. *The Times*, December 28, 1880.
144. L. Carnac, “The Training of a Dancer,” *Pearsons Magazine*, IV,14, 1897, 206.
145. Beaumont, “Our First,” 589.
146. “Children and the Theatre.”
147. A. Bear, *The Times*, February 9, 1889.
148. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 75.
149. Guest, *Ballet*, 132.
150. *The Times*, February 5, 1889.
151. “Children in Pantomimes.”
152. *The Sketch*, February 12, 1896.
153. “Pantomime Children.”
154. “Pantomime Children.”
155. “Pantomime Children.”
156. “Children in Pantomimes.”
157. George Augustus Sala, *Behind the Scenes: A London Magazine*, December 1868, 7, 202.
158. Bedells, *My Dancing*, 21.
159. Bedells, *My Dancing*, 20.
160. Bedells, *My Dancing*, 20.
161. J. B. Booth, “Fifty Years the Old Music Hall a National Product,” *The Times*, March 18, 1932.
162. van brugh, *To Tell My Story*, 92.
163. Guest, *Ballet*, 132.
164. Anon, “The Fairies of the Stage.”
165. Guest, *Ballet*, 132.
166. M. Bancroft, *Mr and Mrs Bancroft On and Off the Stage* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1888), reproduced in *The Vigilance Record*, August 1889, 77.

### 3 THE PERFORMING CHILD AND ITS AUDIENCE

1. C. Scott, *The Era Almanac*, London: Edward Ledger, 1875. The most comprehensive study of the nineteenth century audience comes from the seminal research of Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow who have concluded that: In sum, there was no such thing as a Victorian audience, but rather a variety of audiences, embodying a wide range of perspectives. J. Davis and V. Emeljanow, *Reflecting the Audience: London Theatregoing, 1840–1880* (Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001), 230.
2. C. Hamilton, *The Theory of the Theatre*, New York: Henry Holt, 1910.
3. Hamilton, *The Theory*
4. A. Meynell, *Ceres' Runaway and Other Essays* (London: Constable, 1909). <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/1295>
5. Hamilton, *The Theory*. This practice was something that the industry preferred not to publicise, “NO SOONER is a new director installed in a major opera theatre, whether Covent Garden, the Metropolitan, or La Scala, than he is called upon to answer, as a first question: what do you intend to do about the claque? The answers may vary in phraseology, but they inevitably amount to (a) there is no claque in this theatre, or (b) I intend to abolish it. Whichever answer is offered, the next performance of anything is likely to prove the presence of astral bodies flapping wings in a curious simulation of organized applause.” Quoted in I. Kolodin, *The Musical Life* (New York: Knopf, 1958), 137. However, Christopher Haas shows that the use of the Claque stretched back through the centuries. See C. Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict* (Baltimore: MD: John Hopkins University, 2006), 66.
6. *The Playgoer*, December 1888.
7. *The Interlude*, January 23, 1886. Managers also used this system as a form of self-promotion and paid audience members to repeatedly shout “speech” at the end of a production, (often on first nights when there was a large representation from the press amongst the audience) where, on cue, the manager would appear from behind the curtain to take his bow to appreciative applause. According to one journalist this was a particularly popular form of self-promotion among managers, “speechefying (sic) seems to be the chief disease of the nineteenth century.” (*The Interlude*, January 23, 1886.)
8. *The Interlude*, January 23, 1886.
9. P. Dare, *From School*, 89–115.
10. Dare, *From School*, 89–115.
11. “One difficulty that met us was the interest testified by strangers at the Palace, who when they heard of these gatherings seemed to imagine because the children were ‘ballet dancers’ they must perforce be of a different nature to other children and were much disappointed when being allowed to enter

- the room to find them dressed in poor clothing and looking like ordinary mortals." (E. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs: Or, a Plea for Our City Children* (London: S.W. Partridge, 1884), 20–22.
12. F. Anstey; 'London Music Halls,' *Harpers Monthly Magazine*, January, 1891, XXI, 149–180, 196.
  13. J. Woodfield, *English Theatre in Transition 1881–1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 171.
  14. Meynell, *Ceres' Runaway*.
  15. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 120. Noting the success of pantomimes one journalist commented that, "Audiences have but a small idea of the amount of money spent on these productions and nor can they conceive of the intense anxiety which accompanies the preparation of them." (*The Chiel*, December 19, 1885.)
  16. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 120.
  17. For a detailed example of how popularity translated into long hours of work see "An interview with principle child performer, Francious Richelieu," *The Dart*, January 12, 1883.
  18. R. Foulkes, *Lewis Carroll, and the Victorian Stage, Theatricals in a Quiet Life* (London: Ashgate, 2005), 112.
  19. See Davis and Emeljanow, *Reflecting*; M. R. Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
  20. P. Fisher, *In Dangerous Paths* (London: Theatrical Mission Booklets, 1883), 5–6.
  21. Fisher, *In Dangerous*, 10–12. Pearl Fisher appears to be a pseudonym. In the text one child addresses the interviewer as Sir.
  22. For a detailed record of Vera Beringer's career see B. Crozier, "Notions of Childhood in London Theatre, 1880–1905," PhD thesis (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1981).
  23. *The Era*, February 4, 1888.
  24. *The Morning Post*, May 15, 1888.
  25. *The Standard*, January 11, 1890, 4.
  26. *The Playgoer*, October 31, 1890.
  27. *The Stage*, December 21, 1888. This was something not noticed by one writer who wrote in defence of the industry. "It is doubtful whether there are happier, healthier, or more thoroughly normal children in all England and America than the two little Lord Fauntleroy's—Miss Vera Beringer and Miss Elsie Lynde." (W. A., "Stage Children: A Dialogue," *The World*, August 14, 1889, 12.)
  28. Foulkes, *Lewis Carroll*, 173.
  29. Flashes From The Footlights, *The Licensed Victuallers' Mirror*, October 28, 1890, 514.
  30. Facts and Faces, *The Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times*, January 24, 1891, 50.
  31. *The Stage*, March 2, 1888.

32. M. Bingham, "Earls and Girls," reprinted in B. Green, *Lost Empires; A Music Hall Companion* (London: Pavilion Books, 1986), 197.
33. J. Walvin, *A Child's World A Social History of English Childhood 1800–1914* (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 77.
34. "An Interview with Miss Marion Keates," *The Amusing Journal*, February 9, 1895.
35. I. Vanbrugh, *To Tell My Story* (London: Hutchinson, 1948), 141–142.
36. *The Stage*, January 20, 1888. The writer claimed that "It is an undeniable fact that once the actual footlights have been faced there arises in nearly all instances an unshakable and insatiable desire to go on facing them." Toward the end of the year the paper returned to the subject of what was termed as a "mania" to be on the stage. This second article concerned young girls who made up the numbers in pantomime. Again it is suggested that the desire to be famous cut across the classes regardless of talent. "All over the country these girls are annually drawn from the factory and the workshop." (*The Stage*, January 20, 1888 and December 7, 1888.)
37. "Children and the Theatre," *The Stage*, November 8, 1888.
38. "Pantomime Children," *The Stage*, January 8, 1886.
39. T. Logan, *The Victorian Parlour* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 31.
40. S. Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian England* (London: Greenwood, 1996), 146.
41. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 38.
42. R. Henshaw, "My Money Paid the Rent," *The Times*, February 5, 1889. See also Third Report of the Royal Commission on Education, Parliamentary Papers, 1887, XXX, 305–320.
43. The practice of a child handing over its wage to a parent continued well into the twentieth century. See P. Ayers, "The Hidden Economy of Dockland Families: Liverpool in the 1930s," in *Women's Work and the Family Economy in Historical Perspectives*, eds. P. Hudson and W. R. Lee (Manchester: Manchester University Press); A. Foley, *A Bolton Childhood* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973); R. Roberts, *The Classic Slum, Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century* (London: Penguin, 1990); R. Roberts, *A Ragged Schooling* (London: Penguin, 1990.)
44. H. Gingold, *How to Grow Old Disgracefully. An Autobiography* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1989), 27–28.
45. Vanbrugh, *To Tell My Story*, 92–93.
46. For example see *The Era*, January 8, 1886.
47. "Pantomime Children," *The Stage*, January 8, 1886.
48. *The Pall Mall Gazette*, February 8, 1885.
49. "What a Ballet Costs—A Peep behind the Scenes," *The Sketch*, February 12, 1896.
50. Hamilton, *The Theory*.

51. J. K. Jerome, *Stage Land* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1889), 25.
52. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 39.
53. Hamilton, *The Theory*.
54. After the industry had won over their targeted family audience the notion of respectability which accompanied this opened the door for the all-child audience which was particularly popular with the children of the middle classes. (*The Dart*, January 12, 1883.)
55. *The Illustrated London News*, January 1, 1881.
56. *The Chiel*, January 31, 1885.
57. Crozier, "Notions of Childhood."
58. G. K. Behlmer, *Child Abuse and Moral Reform in England 1870–1908* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982), 78.
59. P. Coveney, *The Image of Childhood. The Individual and Society: A Study of the Theme in English Literature* (London: Penguin, 1967); H. Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (London: Longman, 1967.)
60. C. Hall, "The Early Formation of Victorian domestic Ideology," in *White, Male, Middle Class* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992); S. O. Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in C19 England* (London: Routledge, 1992); A. Vickery, "Golden Ages to Separate Spheres: A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History," *Historical Journal*, 36, 2 (1993): 383–314.
61. J. Briggs, "Women Writers and Writing for Children from Sarah Fielding to E Nesbit," in *Children and Their Books A Collection of Essays to Celebrate the Work of Iona and Peter Opie*, ed. G. Avery and J. Briggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 223.
62. J. Tosh, *A Man's Place. Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 102–122.
63. "Dress Circle Gentility," *The Era*, September 16, 1877.
64. E. Trudgill, *Madonnas and Magdalens: The Origins and Development of Victorian Sexual Attitudes* (London: Heinemann, 1976), 91. Additionally Trudgill has argued that "children and especially girls were a natural form of escapism for an age given to sentiment and whimsy." See also Ernest Dowson, who, stated that he was one of an "ever increasing number of people who received from the beauty of childhood, in art as in life, an exquisite pleasure," E. Dowson, "The Cult of the Child," *Critic*, August 17, 1889. Quoted in H. Lebailly, *C. L. Dodson and the Victorian Cult: A Reassessment on the Hundredth Anniversary of Lewis Carroll's Death*, <http://www.looking-forlewis Carroll.com>
65. J. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight. Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian England* (London: Virago, 1992), 87.
66. C. Mavors, *Pleasure Taken. Performances of Sexuality and Loss in Victorian Photographs* (London: I.B Taurus, 1996), 2.

67. C. Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780–1930* (London: Virago, 1995), 11.
68. *The Bat*, January 3, 1883.
69. R. Kincaid, *Child Loving, The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992), 228. On looking at images of children, Patricia Holland, drawing on Barthes, has discussed “*desired* images . . . the images which viewers long to see, and which give back a sense of stimulation or well-being. Imagery [of children] always draws on and nourishes the fantasy world of human longings. It mediates between memory and dreams. The nostalgia of imagery is part of the nostalgia each of us feels for a lost moment of satisfaction and a longing for a future of reconciliation and peace.” (P. Holland, *Picturing Childhood. The Myth of the Child in Popular Imagery* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 7.
70. C. Ward and T. Ward, *Images of Childhood in Old Postcards* (London: Alan Sutton 1991), 1.
71. R. J. Broadbent, *A History of Pantomime* (London: Simpkin, 1901), 74.
72. C. Robson, *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 10–11.
73. F. Dolman, “Stage Children,” *The English Illustrated Magazine*, xxi (May 1899): 177–184.
74. A. Wilson, “Little Lord Fauntleroy; The Darling of Mothers and the Abomination of a Generation,” *American Literary History*, 8, 2 (1996): 236.
75. J. Maas, *Victorian Painters* (New York: Harrison House, 1969.)
76. M. R. Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre 1850–1910* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 37.
77. N. Brown, *Fairies in Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 45.
78. *The Stage*, May 24, 1889.
79. C. G. Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples: Fairies and Victorian Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 34.
80. *The Sketch*, January 1, 1896.
81. Brown, *Fairies*, 90.
82. Mavors, *Pleasures*, 20. See also N. Auerbach, *Ellen Terry: A Player in Her Time* (Pennsylvania, PA: Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 73.
83. R. A. Schindler, “Fairy Painting after 1850,” <http://www.victorianweb.org/painting/fairy/index.html>
84. *The Bat*, January 3, 1883. See D. Goreham, “The ‘Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon,’ Re-examined, Child Prostitution and the Idea of Childhood in Late-Victorian England,” *Victorian Studies*, 21, 4 (1978): 353–379.
85. R. Hichens, “The Dance of the Hours,” Chapter X, *Flames* (London: Duffield, 1906), <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/14253>
86. T. C. Davis, *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), 106.

87. A. Kuhn, *The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 6, reproduced in, Davis, *Actresses*, 107.
88. Trudgill, *Madonnas and Magdalens*, 8.
89. *The Chiel*, January 3, 1885.
90. Steedman, *Strange*, 136.
91. British Parliamentary Papers, *Third Report*, 1887, 30, 27–37.
92. Booth, *Theatre*, 113.
93. Auerbach, *Ellen*, 73.
94. L. A. Jackson, *Child Sexual Abuse in Victorian England* (London: Routledge, 2000), 96.
95. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 5.
96. Davis, *Actresses*, 106.
97. Kincaid, *Child Loving*, 198.
98. Kincaid, *Child Loving*, 198.
99. Auerbach, *Ellen*, 91.
100. Holland, *Picturing*, 9.
101. G. Cooper, *Gladys Cooper* (London: Hutchinson, 1930), 34–36. Reproduced in J. Clume, *Footlight Notes*, [www.footlightnotes.tripod.com](http://www.footlightnotes.tripod.com)
102. M. H. Harker, “Henry Peach Robinson: The Grammar of Art,” in *British Photography in the Nineteenth Century, the Fine Art Tradition*, ed. M. Weaver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 137.
103. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 69.
104. Trudgill, *Madonnas and Magdalens*, 94.
105. Kincaid, *Child Loving*, 199.
106. See G. Ovenden, *Lewis Carroll* (London: Macdonald, 1984); J. Wullschlager, *Inventing Wonderland : The Lives and Fantasies of Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear, J. M. Barrie, Kenneth Grahame and A. A. Milne* (London: Methuen, 1995), 12.
107. See H. Lebailly, “C. L. Dodson and the Victorian Cult: A Reassessment on the Hundredth Anniversary of ‘Lewis Carroll’s death,” <http://www.looking-forlewis Carroll.com>
108. Ward and Ward, *Images*, 6.
109. D. Mayer, “‘Quote the Words’ To Promote The Attitudes: The Victorian Performer, The Photographer, And The Photograph,” *Theatre Survey*, 43, 2 (November 2002): 228.
110. *The Illustrated Police News*, February 13, 1886, 3.
111. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 81.
112. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 53–54.
113. “Art Behind the Curtain,” *The Theatre*, June 1887.
114. D. Salberg, *Once Upon a Pantomime* (Luton: Cortney Publications, 1981), 115.
115. *The Times*, February 9, 1889.

#### 4 PERFORMING THEIR DUTY: CHILD SAVERS AND THE THEATRICAL CHILD

1. K. Heasman, *Evangelicals in Action: An Appraisal of Their Social Work in The Victorian Era* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962).
2. E. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs, or, a Plea for Our City Children* (London: Partridge, 1884).
3. See G. K. Behlmer, *Child Abuse and Moral Reform in England, 1870–1908* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982); T. C. Davis, “The Employment of Children in the Victorian Theatre,” *New Theatre Quarterly*, 2 (1986): 116–135; C. Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority* (London: Virago, 1995); P. Horn, “English Theatre Children, 1880–1914: A Study in Ambivalence,” *History of Education*, 25, 1 (1996): 37–54
4. Richard Turnbull, *Shaftesbury: The Great Reformer* (London: Lion Hudson, 2010).
5. C. Wells, “A Pocket History of the NSPCC” (London: NSPCC, 2007). See also K. McCrone, “The National Association for the promotion of Social Science and the Advancement of Women,” *Atlantas*, 8, 1, (1982): 44–66, 44.
6. McCrone, “The National Association for the Promotion of Social Science and the Advancement of Women,” 44.
7. M. Fawcett, “The Employment of Children in Theatres,” *The Contemporary Review*, December 1889.
8. H. Rogers, “The Good Are Not Always Powerful, Nor The Powerful Always Good: The Politics of Women’s Needlework in Mid-Victorian London,” *Victorian Studies*, 40, 4 (1997): 589–623.
9. C. M. Leitch, “R. Barnes, Grindrod’s Slaves of the Needle,” MA Thesis in Literary Studies (Waterloo: University of Ontario, 2006), 38; quoting L. N. [Ellen Barlee], “Annals of the Needlewomen,” *English Woman’s Journal* (April 9, 1862): 73.
10. Leitch, “Grindrod’s,” 48 quoting, L. N. “Annals, of the Needlewoman,” 73.
11. E. J. Boucherette, *Hints on Self-Help: A Book for Young Women* (London: Partridge, 1863), 118.
12. See for example, *Pall Mall Gazette*, April 28, 1885; *The Times*, March 18, 1887.
13. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 116.
14. See Heasman, *Evangelicals*, 277; F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980.)
15. P. Fisher, *In Dangerous Paths* (London: Theatrical Mission Booklets, 1883), 10.
16. Heasman, *Evangelicals*, 277.
17. Fisher, *In Dangerous*, 23–24.
18. *The Times*, May 18, 1889.
19. Heasman, *Evangelicals*, 63.
20. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 154.

21. T. Davis, *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), 63–64.
22. Interview with Mr. R. C. Legge, secretary to George Alexander, St James Theatre, King St, Charles Booth Archive, Survey Notebooks, B156, January 21, 1896, 67–76, 141.
23. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 76.
24. Mrs. Jeune, “Children in Theatres,” *The English Illustrated Magazine*, October 1889, 11.
25. D. Rubinstein, “Annie Besant and Stewart Headlam: The London School Board Election of 1888,” *East London Papers*, 13 (1970): 3–24, quoted in David Rubinstein, *A Different World for Women: The Life of Millicent Garrett Fawcett* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 100.
26. Jeune, “Children,” 11.
27. Jeune, “Children,” 11.
28. *The Times*, May 18, 1889.
29. Jeune, “Children,” 12.
30. P. Bedells, *My Dancing Days* (London: Phoenix, 1954), 22–23.
31. “Pantomime Children,” *The Orchestra*, October. 1863–March. 1881; February 1878; 4, 43; *British Periodicals*, 217.
32. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 18.
33. E. Hopkins, *Childhood Transformed Working-Class Children in Nineteenth Century England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 299.
34. D. Hole, *The Church & the Stage: An Early History of the Actors Church Union* (London: The Faith Press, 1934), 13.
35. *The Professional World*, April 1894.
36. *The Stage Directory*, February 1, 1880.
37. *The Stage*, March 4, 1897.
38. See Hole, *The Church*, 16–17. *London City Mission Magazine*, December 1, 1879.
39. “Children in Pantomimes,” *The Stage*, December 7, 1883.
40. “The Theatrical Mission, ‘Stars,’ a Year’s Work in the Theatrical Mission,” *Charities Register and Digest*, London, 1890, 491. Cited in Davis *Actresses*, 63–64.
41. *The Nursing Record & Hospital World*, December 22, 1894, 421.
42. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 176.
43. M. Stanley, *Clubs for Working Girls* (London: Macmillan, 1890), reprinted in F. Booton, ed., *Studies in Social Education 1860–1890* (Hove: Benfield Press, 1985). For further discussion on additional non-sectarian theater club provision see Davis, *Actresses*, 63–64. See also A. Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian Women, Colonialism, and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 99.
44. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 156–157.
45. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 156–157.

46. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 58.
47. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 12–16.
48. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 48.
49. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 55.
50. R. Jackson, ed., *Victorian Theatre* (London: A & C Black, 1989), 252.
51. *The Circulator*, January 7, 1882.
52. *The World*, July 10, 1889.
53. D. Goreham, “The ‘Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon,’ Re-examined, Child Prostitution and the Idea of Childhood in Late-Victorian England,” *Victorian Studies*, 21, 4 (1978): 353–379.
54. H. W. Hobart, “Children in Theatres,” *Justice*, February 16, 1889.
55. “Children and the Theatre,” *The Stage*, November 16, 1888. Similarly Henry Irving claimed that “the idea that children engaged in a theatre suffered any moral or physical harm was a delusion.” (*The Times*, May 18, 1889.)
56. J. F. Runciman, “Stage Children,” in *Side Lights*, ed. J. F. Runciman (London: Fisher Unwin, 1893), Essay IV.
57. Charles Booth Archive, *Survey Notebooks*, B156, January 2, 1896, 13–32, 24.
58. L. Carroll, “Stage Children,” *The Theatre*, September 2, 1889, 115.
59. Mr. Jennings M. P. speaking on the amendment to the Cruelty to Children Prevention Bill reported in *The Times*, July 11, 1889.
60. “The Inside of a Pantomime,” *The Manchester Guardian*, January 10, 1899.
61. M. G. Fawcett, “What Theatrical People Say,” *The London Echo*, December 15, 1888.
62. 1894: “Stage Door Johnnies,” *A Night at the Theatre*, www.peopleplayuk.org
63. Third Report of the Royal Commission on Education, Parliamentary Papers, 1887, XXX, 305–320, 312.
64. Third Report of the Royal Commission on Education, Parliamentary Papers, 1887, XXX, 305–320, 312.
65. For example, girls contracted to the National Training School of Dancing, one of the largest of such establishments, could expect a court summons from its proprietors for the smallest of misdemeanors. Sample cases can be found over a thirteen year period in *The Era*, September 18, 1886 and November 23, 1889; *The Times*, July 5 and 6, 1899.
66. “The Fairies of the Stage,” *The Pall Mall Gazette*, February 9, 1885.
67. *The Era*, January 16, 1889.
68. A. Bear, Letter to *The Times*, February 9, 1889.
69. Third Report of the Royal Commission on Education, Parliamentary Papers, 1887, XXX, 305–320, 307.
70. Bear, *The Times*, February 9, 1889. There was a belief that a theatrical lifestyle would lead to an immoral and corrupt adulthood. See “The Fairies of the Stage,” *The Pall Mall Gazette*, February 9, 1885.
71. *The Times*, July 23, 1889.
72. W. A., “Stage Children: A Dialogue,” *The World*, August 14, 1889.

73. "The Fairies of the Stage," *The Pall Mall Gazette*, February 9, 1885.
74. *The Nursing Record & Hospital World*, December 22, 1894, 421.
75. *The Times*, February 8, 1889.
76. E. Terriss, Letter to *The Times*, May 18, 1903.
77. H. Russell, Letter to *The Times*, February 5, 1889.
78. S. Beale, Letter to *The Times*, February 9, 1889.
79. The 1870 and 1876 Education Acts had brought all areas of child labor under the same protective umbrella. The act targeted agricultural child labor in particular, but also included all the miscellaneous industries that preceding acts had failed to cover.
80. M. Fawcett, "Holes in the Education Net," *The Contemporary Review*, May 1887, 641.
81. M. Fawcett, "Holes in the Education Net," 641.
82. For the clearest summary of the NVA argument see Mrs. Henry Fawcett, "Theatre and Pantomime Children," *National Vigilance Record* (no date, available c. 1887).
83. M. Fawcett, "Employment of Children in Theatres, No.2—What the Teachers of the Children Say," *The Echo*, December 10, 1888.
84. Fawcett, "Holes in the Education Net," 642.
85. Fawcett, "What The Teachers Say."
86. "The Fairies of the Stage," *The Pall Mall Gazette*, February 9, 1885.
87. Reprinted from an unspecified journal of the day in, R. Mander and J. Mitchenson, *Pantomime a Story in Pictures* (London: Peter Davies, 1973), 25–26. See also F. Dolman, "Stage Children. Leading Little Actors and Actresses of the Day," *English Illustrated Magazine*, XXI (1889): 177–185.
88. A. Davin, *Growing Up Poor. Home, School and Street in London 1870–1914* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1996), 111.
89. Fawcett, "Holes in the Education Net," 639.
90. E. Barlee, *Friendless and Helpless* (London: Emily Faithful, 1863), 5.
91. Barlee, *Friendless and Helpless*, 182.
92. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 18.
93. "Converted Imps, Saturday Review," *The Brisbane Courier*, September 1, 1884, 3.
94. J. H. M. Honiball, "Barlee, Sir Frederick Palgrave (1827–1884)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 3 (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1969), 96–99.
95. Report by F. P. Barlee, *Colonization Circular by Great Britain Emigration Commission* (G. E. Eyre & W. Spotswood for HM Stationary Office, London: 1874), 26.
96. Honiball, "Barlee, Sir Frederick," 96–99.
97. "The Theatrical Mission, 'Stars,' a Year's Work in the Theatrical Mission, 1892." *Charities Register and Digest*, London, 1890, 491. Quoted in Davis, *Actresses as Working Women*, 63–64.

98. Miss Barlee to Crown Agents, March 26, 1885, "Letter Advocating the establishment of a Training school for Girls with the Object of Supplying the Demand for Female Servants," Western Australia, Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Council, 1885, 622. (*Italics in original*) quoted in P. Sharpe, *Women, Gender and Labour Migration: Historical and Global Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2001), 160.
99. "Children and the Theatre," *The Stage*, November 16, 1888.
100. M. Fawcett, Third Report of the Royal Commission on Education Parliamentary Papers, 1887, XXX 305–320.
101. *The Times*, May 18, 1889.
102. "The Theatre," *Saturday Night's Manchester Evening News*, December 29, 1888.
103. *The Era*, December 11, 1886.
104. It is useful to note that this meeting was held in the drawing room of NVA member Mrs. Frank Morrison, this gives some indication of the movement's relatively modest size.
105. *The Times*, July 16, 1887.
106. Mrs. M. Fawcett, "Theatre and Pantomime Children," *The Vigilance Record*, 1885.
107. Mrs. Fawcett, "Employment of Children in Theatres," Article 4, "The Economic Difficulty," *The Echo* December 18, 1885.
108. Third Report of the Royal Commission on Education Parliamentary Papers, 1887, XXX, 305–320.
109. *The Times*, July 23, 1887.
110. C. Mitchell, minutes of evidence, Third Report of the Royal Commission on Education Parliamentary Papers, 1887, XXX, 316.
111. J. J. MacNamara, *Schools and Scholars in 1899: Facts and Figures for the Reformer* (London: National Union of Teachers, 1899), 8. Victorian Times Project, <http://www.victoriantimesproject.org/L/D487>. The purpose of this publication was to present, "Statistics to show attendance, and lack of it, at schools. Also contains some examples of how many hours school-age children spend working."
112. *The Schoolmistress*, October 3, 1889.
113. *The Schoolmistress*, October 3, 1889.
114. McNamara, *Schools and Scholars in 1899*, 8.
115. McNamara, *Schools and Scholars in 1899*, 9.
116. *The Times*, February 4, 1889. Typically Actor/Manager, Henry Irving, claimed that; "It was not by any means impossible for them [child performers] to get a considerable amount of schooling." (*The Times*, May 18, 1889.)
117. Fawcett, "Holes in the Education Net," 643.
118. Although Morton's argument was not borne out in law it was most likely based on the unwritten law sanctioned by some school board officers see footnote 104.

119. *The Times*, January 19, 1889.
120. Fawcett, "Holes in the Education Net," 641.
121. *The Times*, January 19, 1889.
122. "Children on the Stage," *The Era*, February 2, 1889. As the proprietor of a dance academy, Francesco was a large provider of trained children.
123. McNamara, *Schools*, 9.
124. Christmas Pantomimes and Child-Performers. *The Newcastle Weekly Courant*, December 22, 1888.
125. M. Fawcett, "The Employment of Children in Theatres," *The Contemporary Review*, December 1889.
126. *The London Echo*, December 12, 1888.
127. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 58.
128. "Children on the Stage," *The Era*, February 2, 1889.
129. "Children on the Stage," *The Era*, February 2, 1889.
130. Fawcett, "Holes in the Education net," 643.
131. *The Era*, December 11, 1886.
132. Fawcett, "Holes in the Education net," 643.
133. Fawcett, "The Employment of Children in Theatres," 829.
134. *The Times*, May 18, 1889.
135. *The Times*, May 18, 1889.
136. Fawcett, "The Employment of Children," 829.
137. *Final Report of the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the Elementary Education Acts of England and Wales* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1888). See also "The Education Commission Final Report," *The Times*, June 28, 1888.
138. *The Vigilance Record*, August 1889, 81.
139. Fawcett, "Holes in the Education net," 641.
140. Hopkins, *Childhood*, 317.
141. N. Auerbach, *Ellen Terry: Player in Her Time* (London: J.M. Dent, 1987), 78.
142. J. K. Jerome, *Stage-Land* (London: A.L. Burt, 1890), 34.
143. Fawcett, "Children in Theatres."
144. Sympathetic publications included the, *Pall Mall Gazette*, *The Star* and *The Echo East London Observer*, July 28, 1888.
145. J. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight* (London: Virago, 1992), 77.
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147. W. Allison, "My Kingdom for a Horse!" *Yorkshire, Rugby, Balliol, the Bar, Bloodstock and Journalistic Recollections* (London: G. Richards, 1919), 323.
148. *The Playgoer*, December 1888.
149. *The Times*, May 28, 1898.
150. *The Times*, February 7, 1889.
151. *The Times*, July 20, 1889.

152. Walkowitz, *City*, 82–83.
153. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 43.
154. W. Allison, “My Kingdom for a Horse!” *Yorkshire, Rugby, Balliol, the Bar, Bloodstock and Journalistic Recollections* (London: G. Richards, 1919), 323.

## 5 PROTECTIVE LEGISLATION AND THE THEATRICAL CHILD

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2. G. K. Behlmer, *Child Abuse and Moral Reform in England 1870–1908* (California: Stanford University Press, 1982), 88.
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4. 1887 Third Report of the Royal Commission on the Working of the Elementary Education Acts in England and Wales, vol. xxx, Cmd.5158.
5. C. T. Mitchell, letter to *The Times*, April 18, 1889. See also M. Fawcett, *The Times*, February 5, 1889.
6. S. Vey, “Good Intentions and Fearsome Prejudice: New York’s 1876 Act to Prevent and Punish Wrongs to Children,” *Theatre Survey*, 42, 1 (2001): 54–68. See also T. J. Gilfoyle, “The Moral Origins of Political Surveillance in New York City 1867–1918,” *American Quarterly*, 38, 4 (1986): 637–652.
7. C.T. Mitchell, letter to *The Times*, April 18, 1889. See also M. Fawcett, *The Times*, February 5, 1889.
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9. C. Wells, *A Pocket History of the NSPCC* (London: NSPCC, 2007). The Bill became known as The Children’s Charter. Behlmer *Child Abuse*, 109.
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16. Wearing, "Harris."
17. P. Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England; Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control 1830–1885* (London: Methuen, 1987); W. M. Eagar, *Making Men* (London: University of London Press, 1953); S. Shipley, *Club Life and Socialism in Mid Victorian London* (London: Journeyman Press, 1987); A. Prescott, "Brother Irving: Sir Henry Irving and Freemasonry," The Irving Society <http://www.theirvingsociety.org.uk/brotherirving.htm>.
18. "Freemasonry in Victorian Theatre and Music" Issue 8, January 2004, <http://www.mqmagazine.co.uk/issue-8/p-50.php>.
19. Prescott, "Brother."
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21. *The Vigilance Record*, August 1889.
22. *The Register News-Pictorial* (Adelaide, SA: 1929–1931), February 1, 1930.
23. J. Pick and R. Protherough, "The Ripper and the Lyceum: The Significance of Irving's Freemasonry," [www.theirvingsociety.org.uk](http://www.theirvingsociety.org.uk). For Harris and the Drury Lane Lodge, see A. M. Broadley, *The Craft: The Drama and Drury Lane* (London: Freemason, 1887.)
24. Pick and Protherough, "The Ripper."
25. Irving for example, throughout his professional life was "a regular, and generous, supporter of Masonic charities." Pick and Protherough, "The Ripper."
26. *The Theatrical Times*, February 14, 1884. See for instance, *The Theatre*, February 1, 1882; *The Interlude*, January 16, 1886.
27. *The Professional World*, April, 1894.
28. *The Amusing Journal*, April 20, 1895.
29. *The Stage*, July 5, 1889.
30. *The Stage*, July 5, 1889.
31. *The Times*, February 5, 1889; *The London Echo*, December 12, 1888; J. F. Runciman, "Stage-Children," in *Side Lights*, ed. J. F. Runciman with Memoir by Grant Allen and Intro. W. T. Stead (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1893.) [www.gutenbergproject.org](http://www.gutenbergproject.org).
32. Barlee, *Pantomime Waifs*, 89.
33. G. A. Sala, "Living London," 1882, <http://www.victorianlondon.org>.
34. "The Burning of the Grand," *The Era*, January 7, 1888.
35. Marie Bancroft, Letter to *The Era*, July 27, 1889. An edited version of this letter also appeared in, *The Times*, July 31, 1889.
36. Bancroft, Letter to *The Era*, July 27, 1889.
37. M. Bancroft, *Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft On and Off the Stage* (London: Richard Bentley, 1888), reproduced in *The Vigilance Record*, August 1889, 77.
38. *The Vigilance Record*, August 1889, 77.
39. Article reproduced in *The Vigilance Record*, August 1889, 77.
40. Lionel Rose similarly notes the contradiction in actress Ellen Terry's memoirs of her own theatrical childhood and her contemporary comments on not allowing children on the stage until ten years old, See E. Craig and

- C. St. John, *Ellen Terry's Memoirs* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1932), 14–15. Quoted in, L. Rose, *The Erosion of Childhood: Child Oppression in Britain, 1860–1918* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 61.
41. *The Stage*, May 17, 1889.
  42. M. Fawcett, letter to *The Times*, July 19, 1889.
  43. *The Theatre*, September 2, 1889.
  44. *The Times*, April 16; May 17; June 15, 1889. Quoted in Behlmer, *Child Abuse*, 105.
  45. Prescott observes that, “Like their public school colleagues, the male school board teachers used freemasonry to affirm their professional and social status.” (A. Prescott, “The Study of Freemasonry as a New Academic Discipline,” University of Sheffield, www.freemasonry.dept.shef.ac.uk.)
  46. J. J. McNamara, *Schools and Scholars in 1899: Facts and Figures for the Reformer* (London: National Union of Teachers, 1899.)
  47. McNamara, *Schools*, 9.
  48. *The Times*, May 18, 1889. Cruelty to Children Prevention Bill, 87. *HC Deb June 26 1889*, 337 cc797–850, 797.
  49. *The Stage*, July 19, 1889; *The Times*, May 18, 1889.
  50. *The Times*, July 23, 1889.
  51. *The Times*, July 23, 1889.
  52. *The Times*, July 24, 1889.
  53. Prescott, “Brother.”
  54. “Cruelty to Children (Prevention) Bill, Parliament, House of Commons Wednesday July 10,” *The Times*, July 11, 1889.
  55. *The Times*, July 23, 1889.
  56. *The Times*, July 23, 1889.
  57. *The Times*, July 24, 1889.
  58. *The Times*, July 23, 1889.
  59. *The Times*, July 30, 1889. As a founder member of the SPCC it must be remembered that Waugh had a hidden agenda for opposing NVA demands, as its proposed clause threatened the passing of the whole Bill.
  60. *The Vigilance Record*, August 17, 1889.
  61. *The Times*, July 1889.
  62. H. W. Hobart, *Justice*, February 16, 1889.
  63. M. Fawcett, “Holes in the Education Net,” *Contemporary Review*, 1887, 639.
  64. W. A. “Stage Children: A Dialogue,” *The World*, August 14, 1889, 12.
  65. *The World*, July 10, 1889.
  66. “Children in Pantomimes,” *The Stage*, December 7, 1883.
  67. G. Tuckwell, *The State and Its Children* (London: Methuen, 1894), 126.
  68. The clause which disadvantaged theatrical children was, for some supporters of the industry, not forfeit enough. Commending the support of Lord Dunraven and Joseph Chamberlain whilst denouncing the passage of the clause an editorial in *The Stage* stated, “These utterances of Peer and

Commoner will be of service to the managers in their uphill fight against the odds which lie not only in the alarms and excursions of fanatical bodies that have somehow caught the public ear but also in the action of a legislature that in its ignorance is about to play the game of the . . . London County Council in harassing the amusements of the nation." (*The Stage*, July 19, 1889.) It is worth noting that despite Joseph Chamberlain being a long standing campaigner for educational reform, he was instrumental in passing a clause which would allow the employment of children as young as seven.

69. Ian Johns for example claims that "Fawcett's campaign won through to guarantee the welfare of the stage-struck youngster." I. Johns, "When Little Children Suffer: Kids in the Limelight," *Times Online*, April 11, 2005. Similarly, in her early research Anne Varty concluded that "In the last decade of the nineteenth century the public, still hungry for stage babies, had to be satisfied with rhetoric and parody. A. Varty, "The Rise and Fall of The Victorian Stage Baby," *New Theatre Quarterly*, 21, (August 3, 2005): 222.
70. Report of Chief Inspector of Factories, cf. Reports for 1893, 326; Report for 1895, 205. Quoted in F. Keeling, *Child Labour in the United Kingdom* (London: Kingston, 1914), 14. In his comprehensive study of child labor legislation in the United Kingdom, Keeling offers the only complete record of theatrical child law. In addition to general legislation Keeling details the bylaws specific to each region and how these were interpreted in each borough.
71. cf. Reports for 1893, 326; Report for 1895, 205. Quoted in Keeling, *Child*, 14.
72. For example, 13 cases in 1896, (Report, 55), 11 in 1901, (Report, XII), 24 in 1902, (Report, XX), Quoted in Keeling, *Child*, 14.
73. Cf. Reports for 1893, 326; Report for 1895, 205, quoted in Keeling, *Child*, 14.
74. Keeling, *Child*, 14–16. See also P. Horn, "English Theatre Children 1880–1914: A Study in Ambivalence," *History of Education*, 25, 1 (1996): 49.
75. "Chit Chat," *The Stage*, May 28, 1896.
76. Miss Fanny Laughton, Chorus lady, Theatre Royal Drury Lane, January 2, 1896, Charles Booth Archive, *Survey Notebooks*, B156, January 24, 1896, 18.
77. "Chit Chat," *The Stage*, September 22, 1898.
78. "Cases in Court," *The Stage*, February 23, 1899.
79. Cf. Reports for 1893, 326; Report for 1895, 205.
80. "Chit Chat," *The Stage*, September 22, 1898.
81. G. B Shaw, *Dramatic Criticism 1895–98* (New York: Hill and Wing, 1959), 291–292. Quoted in N. Auerbach, *Ellen Terry: Player in Her Time* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1989), 454. Matthew White Ridley, first Viscount

- Ridley (July 25, 1842–November 28, 1904.) Home Secretary from 1895 to 1900, Reginald Lucas and Jane Ridley, “Ridley, Matthew White, first Viscount Ridley (1842–1904),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/35754.
82. “Cases in Court,” *The Stage*, February 23, 1899.
  83. Interview with Miss Fanny Laughton, chorus lady, Theatre Royal, Drury lane, January 2, 1896. Booth, *Survey Notebooks*, B156, 13–32.
  84. Interview with Sir Augustus Harris, Booth *Survey Notes. Notebook*, B156, 96.
  85. B. Crozier, “Notions of Childhood in London Theatre, 1880–1905,” unpublished PhD thesis, Cambridge University, 1981, 195.
  86. Ellaline Terriss, *The Times*, May 18, 1903.
  87. “House of Commons, Employment of Children Bill,” reported in *The Times*, June 23, 1903.
  88. H. Irving, Letter to *The Times*, June 25, 1903.
  89. Old agitation was falling away with the death of Ellen Barlee in 1897 and prominent NVA member Annette Bear returning to her native Australia in April 1890, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/20198977?versionId=23821742>. Also Millicent Garrett Fawcett had increased her involvement in the Women’s Suffrage movement.
  90. “House of Commons, Employment of Children Bill,” reported in *The Times*, June 24, 1903.
  91. “Political Notes,” *The Times*, April 25, 1903.
  92. Like those campaigners from 1889 to 1903, opponents recognised the popularity and economic power of the industry and that it was futile to demand too much too soon.
  93. Mr. Markham, MP, *The Times*, June 23, 1903.
  94. *The Times*, June 23, 1903.
  95. *The Times*, June 23, 1903. During the debate, Brampton Gordon MP stated that, “Children under twelve ought not to be allowed to earn their own living.” (*The Times*, June 23, 1903.)
  96. Ernest Gray, MP, reported in *The Times*, June 23, 1903.
  97. Home Secretary, Mr. Akers Douglas, reported in *The Times*, June 23, 1903.
  98. House of Commons Speech made by T.W. Russell, MP, reported in *The Times*, June 23, 1903.
  99. The legal age a child could appear on stage after first obtaining a license was ten years. See H. Stanley, *Can You Hear Me Mother? Sandy Powell’s Lifetime of Music Hall* (London: Jupiter Books, 1977), 13.
  100. Stanley, *Can You*, 13.
  101. Stanley, *Can You*, 15.
  102. There were calls in 1908 to secure amendments in the Children’s Bill which would provide for theatrical licence applications being heard in juvenile courts, “Employment of Children in Theatres,” *The Times*, May 19, 1908.

- The 1908 Children's Bill created the juvenile legal system in the United Kingdom see for example, H. Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society, 1880–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 49; J. Muncy and B. Goldson, "England and Wales the New Correctionalism," in *Comparative Youth Justice*, ed. J. Muncy and B. Goldson (London: Sage, 2006), 35.
103. N. Daglish, "Education policy and the question of child labour: the Lancashire cotton industry and R.D. Denman's Bill of 1914," *History of Education*, 30, 3 (2001): 291–308.
  104. Daglish, "Education," 302. See also "Children in Theatres," *The Times*, March 24, 1914; "Poplar Children and the Pantomime; A Budget of Essays," *The Times*, February 4, 1914; "Children on the Stage, Some Effects of the New Employment Bill," *The Times*, March 20, 1914; "Employment of Children on Stage," *The Times*, March 21, 1914; Letter from Oswald Stoll, "Children on the Stage," *The Times*, March 23, 1914; "Children on the Stage. The Demand for Exclusion, Mr. H. A. Jones and the Rights of the Public," *The Times*, March 23 and 24, 1914; "Children on the Stage, Magistrate's Refusal of a License. Mr. Galsworthy's New Play Affected," *The Times*, April 18, 1914; B. Weller Letter to the editor, "Children on the Stage. The Law and Juvenile Performers." *The Times*, April 20, 1914.
  105. "Children on the Stage, Magistrate's Refusal of a License. Mr. Galsworthy's New Play Affected."
  106. PRO ED 31/197, R. D. Denman to J. Galsworthy, March 25, 1914, Denman Papers Box 2, quoted in Daglish, "Education," 302. Denman's proposal was already law in Scotland.
  107. A. J Mundella to R. D. Denman, March 18, 1914, Denman Papers Box 2, quoted in Daglish, "Education," 302.
  108. Ibid
  109. "Children on the stage. The Case for Uniformity in Regulations," *The Times*, May 25, 1914.
  110. "Parents know (to put their motives on the lowest ground) that there is small chance of an engagement for an ill-kept and ill-fed child. At pantomime time if at no other time of the year a small wage-earner will be fed-up and turned out as smart as funds will allow." ("Children on the Stage: The Demand for Exclusion," *The Times*, March 24, 1914.)
  111. "Children on the Stage: The Demand for Exclusion."
  112. The Statement of Law, point 14, of the Report of the Theatrical Children Licences Committee: Report of the Committee appointed by the President of the Board of Education to advise the Board as to the rules which they should make with reference to licences to children to take part in entertainments under the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act, 1904, as amended by section 13 (2) of the Education Act, 1918. Appointed January 1919, signed July 1919. Sessional papers, session 1919, HSMO, Cmd 484, XXX.

113. The committee members included Italia Conti proprietor of a training school for child performers and Mrs. H. B Irving who was a respected actress and as Dorothea Baird began her career at aged sixteen. She went on to marry and have a longstanding acting partnership, with Henry Irving's eldest son.
114. Theatrical Children Licences Committee Report, Sessional papers, July 1919 Cmd. 484, xxx.
115. For this argument see D. Colclough, "British Child Performers 1920–1940: New Issues, Old Legacies," in *Entertaining Children: The Participation of Youth in the Entertainment Industry*, ed. G. Arrighi and V. Emeljanow (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 73–90.

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