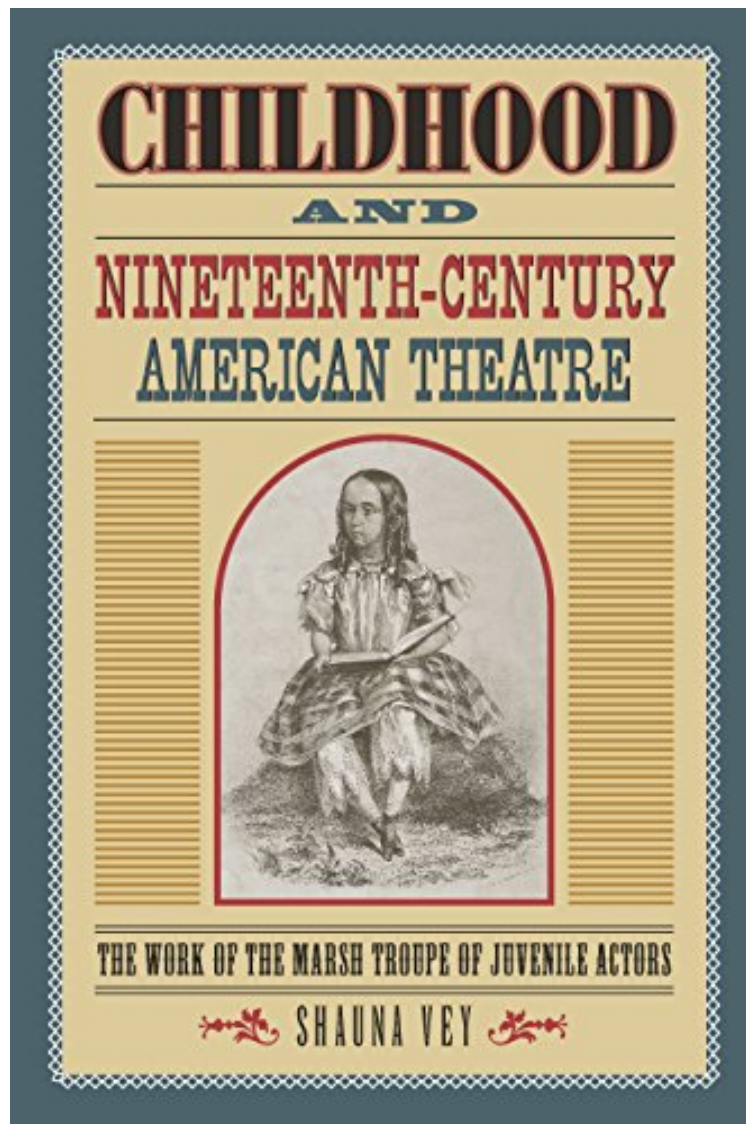


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Childhood and Nineteenth-Century American Theatre: The Work of the Marsh Troupe of Juvenile Actors (Theater in the Americas)

Shauna Vey

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Shauna Vey : Childhood and Nineteenth-Century American Theatre: The Work of the Marsh Troupe of Juvenile Actors (Theater in the Americas) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Childhood and Nineteenth-Century American Theatre: The Work of the Marsh Troupe of Juvenile Actors (Theater in the Americas):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. When you can feel the cinders on your face from the locomotive as

she's describing theatrical touring in the 1850's

By Clancy fan from the start

When you can feel the cinders on your face from the locomotive as she's describing theatrical touring in the 1850's, you know the author has not only done her research, but also knows how to communicate. Full disclosure: 40 years ago, Shauna was an undergrad. theatre major where I was a grad. assistant and later, after she earned her first grad. degree, we were fellow alums starting our careers in NYC, she in Equity stage management on Broadway. Other than Christmas cards, and a note announcing this book, we haven't had occasion for contact in this century. I bought the Kindle version. This is a thorough, heartfelt and academically rigorous portrait of a very special group of people, each with their own motivations and expectations based in the mores of the time. Shauna consistently provides enough context so that we can understand their actions, without inundating us with atmosphere for its own sake. She uses the story of this troupe to show how the transition to today's attitudes about children began in the mid-19th century and the way that these attitudes informed each of these people's lives. She also uses her own research and experience to prove that professional performing children are, indeed, young actors who bring their own unique gifts to the stage. I can attest to the truth of this, having seen it every day of my working life during 25 years with a state theatre. Her attention to academic rigor in her sources is beyond anything we learned from the faculty at the Theatre Research Institute: they never said anything about going to a cemetery to check the headstone. I know that her information about 19th century rural cemeteries is spot on: I run one as a volunteer - I can see it from my desk now. In my business, theatrical production, you're only as good as what you recommend, and I am very happy to recommend this book.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Fascinating and Engrossing Book!

By Holly K. A fascinating and engrossing account of child performers in nineteenth-century United States. Ms Vey has brilliantly researched and brought to light a slice of American theatre. Focused on the Marsh Troupe, the book covers not only the players involved but also adult views of childhood itself and how it has changed throughout the eras. This is a highly recommended read for not only anyone involved in theatre but anyone looking for a interesting and unusual insight into American history.

From 1855 until 1863, the Marsh Troupe of Juvenile Comedians, a professional acting company of approximately thirty children, entertained audiences with their nuanced performances of adult roles on stages around the globe. In *Childhood and Nineteenth-Century American Theatre: The Work of the Marsh Troupe of Juvenile Actors*, author Shauna Vey provides an insightful account not only of this unique antebellum stage troupe but also of contemporary theatre practices and the larger American culture, including shifts in the definition of childhood itself. Looking at the daily work lives of five members of the Marsh Troupe—the father and manager, Robert Marsh, and four child performers, Mary Marsh, Alfred Stewart, Louise Arnot, and Georgie Marsh—Vey reveals the realities of the antebellum theatre and American society: the rise of the nineteenth-century impresario; the emerging societal constructions of girlhood and goodness; the realities of child labor; the decline of the apprenticeship model of actor training; shifts in gender roles and the status of working women; and changes in the economic models of theatre production, including the development of the stock company system. Both a microhistory of a professional theatre company and its juvenile players in the decade before the Civil War and a larger narrative of cultural change in the United States, *Childhood and Nineteenth-Century American Theatre* sheds light on how childhood was idealized both on and off the stage, how the role of the child in society shifted in the nineteenth century, and the ways economic value and sentiment contributed to how children were viewed.

“Saved from the dustbin of history and brought center stage from a mere footnote, the Marsh Troupe of Juvenile Actors, unique in the history of juvenile performers during the transitional antebellum period, are given the due they much deserve in Shauna Vey’s superb study. After extensive research, Vey places the Marshes and their troupe in the context of theatrical practices of the day, and relates her findings to the phenomenon of juvenile players both before this time frame and since.” —Don B. Wilmeth, coeditor of *The Cambridge History of American Theatre*

“It is a rare scholar who takes the time to thoroughly research the nearly invisible true world of children in the entertainment industry. Shauna Vey has written well and wisely, and I learned much.” —Paul Petersen, actor on *The Donna Reed Show* and president emeritus of *A Minor Consideration*

“Set in an age when children worked but also when childhood was becoming the age of innocence, this record of child actors in mid-nineteenth-century America tells us much about both the history of the theatre and the transformation of youth, helping to make sense of the modern dilemma of child labor in the entertainment industry. This well-researched and delightfully written story should reach a wide audience.” —Gary Cross, Distinguished Professor of Modern History, Pennsylvania State University

“For scholars who seek better to understand the fraught history of child labour, especially child labour in the entertainment business, Vey’s *Childhood and Nineteenth-Century American Theatre* is a welcome addition.” —Eleanor Huntington, *Childhood in the Past: An International Journal*

“Shauna Vey’s meticulously researched book opens up the world of the Marsh Troupe for us. Melding social and cultural history, she investigates the working conditions of child actors and the larger context of cultural assumptions about and understandings of childhood as a phenomenon. Providing both close analysis of three of the leading performers in the troupe—Mary Marsh, Georgie Marsh, and Louise Arnot—she intertwines biographical

details with an exploration of how these children fit into the personae available to young actors." —Sarah Chinn, *Journal of Social History* "Ultimately, Vey persuades that this minor company is worthy of critical attention, dispelling any diminutive assumptions about the professional significance of a children's troupe. This company, Vey insists, made an important contribution to nineteenth-century American theater by training a substantial number of young actors and establishing a model for the juvenile of the next generation. Most significantly, she provides a fresh perspective on the experiences of touring professional actors, child performers, and antebellum children through her close focus on this previously overlooked troupe of children." — Edel Lamb, *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* "This study of child performers on the 19th-century American stage is a rare treat. Thanks to her rigorous research, Vey (theater and communication, New York City College of Technology, CUNY) is able to provide a vivid picture of child actors in the pre-film days and also bring to life then rich atmosphere and rough-and-tumble nature of popular theater in a time of significant social transition. Focusing on the Marsh Troupe of Juvenile Comedians, Vey effectively reveals changing attitudes about the exploitation of working children and the nature of an audience at that time drawn to romanticized images of the lives (and deaths) of children." —J. Fisher, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, *CHOICE*; "Vey's extensive archival research—culled from newspapers, contracts, advertisements, grave markers, and census records—is the starting point for insightful contextualization and interpretation. The early chapters give an overview of the troupe's history under the leadership of Robert Marsh, who founded the company starting with his own two children. Along the way, Vey offers detailed profiles of Marsh and four of the children. Each of these subjects figures a different manifestation of social, theatrical, and economic change." —Ryan Bunch, Rutgers University Camden, *The Lion and the Unicorn* "Situating her meticulously researched study within the dual frame of theatre studies and childhood studies, Vey's book contributes to antebellum theatre history (particularly concerning touring outside the major theatre production centers York and Philadelphia) to the social history of American childhood." —Gillian Arrighi, University of Nebraska, reviewer for *Theatre Annual* "In a cogent afterword, Vey adeptly synthesizes her main argument that historians need to acknowledge the professional labors and capable skills of all child actors, and to resist 'our society's inconsistent, and somewhat schizoid, view of childhood' (147). Although she contends that acting conditions and proverbial constructs of childhood 'were changing' at this historical moment (143), her 'distinct models' of the four Marsh children, together with analogous examples of other young theatre, film, and television actors, evidence a far more varied and realistic trajectory of childhood continuity. Ultimately, Vey's remarkable text reminds us that the capitalist-driven labors of child actors deserve far more recognition, respect, and celebration." —Jeanne Klein, University of Kansas, reviewer for *Theatre Journal* "Fortunately, Shauna Vey's work on the Marsh Troupe of Juvenile Comedians demonstrates very persuasively that we need to see child performers as part of a continuum of skilled nineteenth-century theatrical workers. Founded by Robert Guérineau Marsh in Philadelphia, the troupe lasted from 1855 until 1863, and comprised of approximately thirty child actors who performed adult material for audiences of a range of ages." —Cecilia Morgan, University of Toronto, *Theatre Survey*