

## FROM THE EDITOR

### PERFORMING GIRLHOODS

One day in the early 1980s, my best friend Jen and I sat in her kitchen and compiled a Christmas list of *Annie* products. Jen had just seen a local production of the 1977 musical, and we were eagerly awaiting the release of the 1982 film starring Albert Finney, Ann Reinking, and Carol Burnett. As seven-year-old girls growing up in the Reagan era (albeit in Canada), we were captivated by the story of a spunky orphan who charms her way into a millionaire's home. We loved *Annie*. We wanted to *become* *Annie*, which we accomplished with our own basement production of the show—Jen was *Annie*; I played Molly, Grace, and Miss Hannigan. And we also wanted any and all objects associated *with* *Annie*. Our list included *Annie* dolls, *Annie* watches, *Annie* pins, *Annie* pencils, *Annie* jewelry, *Annie* stationery, *Annie* books, and *Annie* costumes. We didn't know if our parents would ever find all of the *Annie*-branded objects we listed—or if such objects even existed outside our twinned imagination—but as our list grew, the prospect of an entire world of *Annie* objects gave us tremendous joy. It would be years before I understood the strategic importance of the commodity tie-in to the promotion of films and Broadway musicals, or the way that such commodities engage children in laboring on behalf of a brand—a phenomenon Maurya Wickstrom has written about so brilliantly.<sup>1</sup> But my seven-year-old self implicitly recognized the importance of the film *Annie* and its tie-in products to my own performance of girlhood: they offered me access to, if not quite possession of, *Annie*'s cuteness, pluck, and vocal power.<sup>2</sup>

This issue of *Theatre Survey* investigates theatre's role in the lived experiences of those who identify as girls and analyzes girls' contributions to professional and nonprofessional performance. As historical subjects marginalized by age and gender,<sup>3</sup> girls exist on the fringes of theatre and performance history, rarely popping into historical narratives except in exceptional situations, as with the phenomenal success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the late nineteenth century or the popularity of the Broadway musical *Wicked* in the twenty-first.<sup>4</sup> Yet there is ample evidence to suggest that girls have *always* been active consumers of and participants in theatrical entertainment, even when parents, custom, or the law forbade them from attending the theatre or performing onstage. So too theatrical representations of girlhood, from Shakespeare's *Rosalind* to Thornton Wilder's *Emily Webb*, to the teenage soccer players in Sarah DeLappe's *The Wolves*, have long informed the lived experiences of children of all genders and subsequently shaped performances of girlhood in sites ranging from the playground and the parlor to the schoolroom and the mall.<sup>5</sup> Taking a cue from girlhood studies, this issue seeks to move girls from the margins to the center of theatre and performance history.

Girlhood studies has grown rapidly since its emergence in the 1990s.<sup>6</sup> Working from the premise that “children as a rule are some of history's most silent

subjects,”<sup>7</sup> this interdisciplinary field challenges women’s studies for overlooking, dismissing, or undervaluing the contributions of girls in its desire to celebrate the political advances of women. Girlhood studies likewise pushes against childhood studies and tendencies among historians to lump the experiences of boys and girls together under the category of the “child,” a move that fails to account for the very different material conditions that shape the daily lives of girls and boys.<sup>8</sup> By foregrounding the construction, formation, and performance of “girlhood” as a historical category,<sup>9</sup> while also paying attention to the lived realities of those who identify as girls, girlhood studies offers a much richer account of the gendering, racialization, classing, and nationalization of girlhood as a process and brings to light the many ways that girls have asserted political and social agency.

But what is a girl, and at what point does a girl transition from girlhood into womanhood? “While it seems every woman has been a girl and every female child is one,” girlhood studies scholar Catherine Driscoll writes, “it is not clear what this means.”<sup>10</sup> When does a girl become a woman: at the point of menstruation, sexual activity, marriage, childbirth, or some other major life moment? Can chronological age be a measure of girlhood or does girlhood exceed age? And what about gender?<sup>11</sup> As Catherine Robson argues in her study of prominent Victorian writers, many nineteenth-century men lamented what she terms their “lost girlhood,” a time during childhood when they were able to enjoy the pleasures of domestic life before being compelled to assume the mantle of Victorian manhood.<sup>12</sup> Robson’s study foregrounds the distinctly performative nature of girlhood. Like all identity categories, girlhood is a historical, geographic, and cultural construct, one that achieves a certain kind of naturalization over time through the “stylized repetition of acts.”<sup>13</sup> What this means, then, is that scholars must avoid presentist assumptions about earlier notions of girlhood and instead understand the performances of past girlhoods on their own historical, geographic, and cultural terms.

The five essays gathered in this issue illustrate the value of a girlhood studies approach for theatre and performance studies scholarship. In “Recovering Miss Rose: Acting as a Girl on the Eighteenth-Century Stage,” Aparna Gollapudi traces the short-lived career of a five-year-old girl who electrified London audiences during the 1769–70 season with her portrayal of comic heroes like Henry Fielding’s Tom Thumb. The excitement that surrounded Miss Rose subsided almost as quickly as it had erupted, however, due in no small part to managerial prejudice against her mother, Elizabeth de Franchetti, whose promotional machinations on her daughter’s behalf anticipate the emergence of the “stage mother” figure. In documenting the twists and turns of Miss Rose’s career, Gollapudi astutely observes that, for eighteenth-century audiences, attending the performance of a child actress often involved watching a girl play a *boy*, since there were relatively few opportunities for girls to act *as* girls onstage. A girl acting was therefore quite different from a girl *acting* as a girl, and the gap between the two lent itself to new forms of gendered expression.

Miss Rose’s career faltered when she, or rather her mother, fell out of favor with London’s powerful managers. Ann Folino White considers the challenges that many stagestruck girls continued to face in their interactions with managers one and a half centuries later. Her article, “In Behalf of the Feminine Side of

the Commercial Stage: The Institute of the Woman's Theatre and Stagestruck Girls," examines the important, previously overlooked, efforts of the Institute of the Woman's Theatre to develop a professional woman-led theatre in New York City and provide advice and support to young girls, many of whom arrived in the city with very little training or knowledge of the theatre business. Paradoxically, however, as much as the institute existed to support stagestruck girls, its members continued to cling to established notions of talent and ability, inadvertently propping up the masculinist theatre culture they sought to dismantle. Although Folino White frankly admits that her thesis is provisional due to the limitations of the available evidence, she overcomes this challenge by reading "between the lines and against the grain," modeling a mode of feminist theatre historiography that recognizes the use of indirection and evasion in women's writing as a mean of addressing gender oppression.

The next two articles explore the lives and experiences of black girls in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, joining conversations central to the emerging field of black girlhood studies (BGS). BGS scholars "recognize that the invisibility of black girls in dominant culture poses particular problems for studying Black girlhood" and actively seek new strategies to bring black girls' lives, bodies, and voices into focus.<sup>14</sup> In "The Cakewalk Photo Girl and Other Footnotes in African American Musical Theatre," Jeanne Klein follows the careers of five female performers who participated in the dynamic expansion of African American musical comedy through their often backgrounded labor as cakewalk dancers, "pickaninnies," and chorus girls. Drawing on a diverse range of sources including photographs, promotional postcards, sheet-music covers, and newspaper clippings from the 1890s and 1900s, Klein moves these previously backgrounded girls to the fore, highlighting the role of performance in their pursuit of "freedom and survival during the oppressive Jim Crow era of segregation." In "Black Girlish Departure and the 'Semiotics of Theater' in Harriet Jacobs's Narrative; or, Lulu & Ellen: Four Opening Acts," Allison Curseen likewise addresses the disappearance of black girls from historical narratives in a brilliant and meticulous rereading of Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). Acknowledging the presence of the often silent but by no means absent character of the child Ellen, Curseen usefully extends Sandra Richards's "call to read drama as drama by positing that reading *as drama* is a reading mode, one that we might also apply to non-dramatic texts."

Unlike Ellen, the girls at the center of Michelle Liu Carriger's article, "'Maiden's Armor': Global Gothic Lolita Fashion Communities and Technologies of Girly Counteridentity," enjoy a kind of hypervisibility thanks to their embrace of ruffles, lace, hats, bows, crinolines, and other features of so-called gothic lolita fashion. Originating in Tokyo's Harajuku neighborhood in the 1990s, gothic lolita swiftly became a global phenomenon, aided by social media and the success of the "Cool Japan" campaign. Although it might be tempting to dismiss gothic lolita as little more than an extended fad that delights in the superficial, Carriger argues that the girls (and boys) who identify with the style model new forms of self-expression that challenge conventional gender norms as they draw from nineteenth-century European and Japanese culture. Like the other authors in this issue, Carriger

aims to understand girls on their own terms, and in so doing offers an insightful analysis of a fascinating subculture.

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This issue marks the formal beginning of my term as Editor of *Theatre Survey*, and so I would like to take a moment to thank my predecessor, Nicholas Ridout, for his time, patience, and good humor during the transition process. I also want to acknowledge the members of ASTR's Publications Committee, especially Catherine Cole and Esther Kim Lee, the former and current Vice Presidents for Publications. And at *Theatre Survey*, I am grateful to Holly Buttimore, Jonathan S. Geffner, and Michael Gnat, for helping to make the production process so smooth. Finally, a very warm welcome to our new Associate Editor Brandi Catanese, with whom I look forward to working in the years ahead.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Maurya Wickstrom, *Performing Consumers: Global Capital and Its Theatrical Seductions* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Wickstrom, "Commodities, Mimesis and *The Lion King*: Retail Theatre for the 1990s," *Theatre Journal* 51.3 (1999): 285–98.

2. On the commodity tie-in or tie-up, see Jeanne Allen, "The Film Viewer as Consumer," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 5.4 (1980): 481–99; Mary Anne Doane, "The Economy of Desire: The Commodity Form in/of the Cinema," *Quarterly Review of Film & Video* 11.1 (1989): 23–33; Judith Mayne, "Immigrants and Spectators," *Wide Angle* 5.2 (1982): 32–41; Jane Gaines, "The Queen Christina Tie-Ups: Convergence of Show Window and Screen," *Quarterly Review of Film & Video* 11.1 (1989): 35–60; Charles Eckert, "The Carole Lombard in Macy's Window" (1978), repr. in *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*, ed. Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog (New York: Routledge, 1990), 100–21; Charlotte Cornelia Herzog and Jane Marie Gaines, "'Puffed Sleeves before Tea-Time': Joan Crawford, Adrian and Woman Audiences," *Wide Angle* 6.4 (1985): 24–33.

3. *Girlhood: A Global History*, ed. Jennifer Helgren and Colleen A. Vasconcellos (New Brunswick, NJ, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 4.

4. On childhood and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, see Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 13–16, 92–145. On *Wicked* and female fans, see Stacy Wolf, "Wicked Divas, Musical Theater, and Internet Girl Fans," *Camera Obscura* 22.2 (65) (2007): 39–71.

5. For a recent overview of plays for and/or about teenage girls, see Helen Schultz, "Teenage Girls on Stage: Young Women Who Do Things," *HowlRound*, 13 October 2017, <http://howlround.com/teenage-girls-on-stage-young-women-who-do-things>, accessed 8 September 2018.

6. On girlhood studies see Catherine Driscoll, *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Helgren and Vasconcellos. On girlhood studies and performance see Heather Warren-Crow, *Girlhood and the Plastic Image* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press [Lebanon, NH: UPNE], 2014); Kristen Hatch, *Shirley Temple: The Performance of Girlhood* (New Brunswick, NJ, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2015); Deanne Williams, *Shakespeare and the Performance of Girlhood* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Heather Marie Fitzsimmons Frey, "Victorian Girls and At-home Theatricals: Performing and Playing with Possible Futures" (Ph.D. diss., Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies, University of Toronto, 2015).

7. Helgren and Vasconcellos, 4.

8. Williams, 2.

9. Helgren and Vasconcellos, 3.

10. Driscoll, 2.
11. Driscoll, 2–3; also Helgren and Vasconcellos, 3.
12. Catherine Robson, *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
13. Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40.4 (1988): 519–31, at 519.
14. Tammy C. Owens et al., “Towards an Interdisciplinary Field of Black Girlhood Studies,” *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research* 6.3 (2017): 116–32, at 118. This article, which includes an annotated bibliography of recent scholarship, is an indispensable source for anyone interested in BGS. See also Kyra D. Gaunt, *The Games Black Girls Play: Learning the Ropes from Double-Dutch to Hip-Hop* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Ruth Nicole Brown, *Black Girlhood Celebration: Toward a Hip-Hop Feminist Pedagogy* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009); Aimee Meredith Cox, *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).