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## 'Heard But Not Seen': An Anthology of Victorian Childhood devised and presented

Gabriel Woolf

Rosalind Shanks

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**‘Heard But Not Seen’: An Anthology of Victorian Childhood devised and presented by Gabriel Woolf and Rosalind Shanks, 17 April 1997 in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Nuneaton; 18 April 1997 Warwick Arts Centre,**

This year’s performance of readings was subtitled A Victorian Edition of Children’s Hour, and was intended for adults. The programme was constructed round the framework of the childhood of Tom and Maggie from *The Mill on the Floss* and included insights into the lives of other children in both fact and fiction.

Actors are usually advised that it is unwise to act with children, but to play the part of a child is another matter, and certainly not child’s play. We suspended disbelief, however, and enjoyed the guilelessness of Ruthless Rhymes by Harry Graham as well as Tom and Maggie’s joys and sorrows.

The juxtaposition of the items was well arranged: for instance, we progressed in Part One from Tom and Maggie eating jam puffs, through Ruthless Rhymes to the sombre passing of Jo the crossing sweeper, from *Bleak House*. Then followed the lighter episode of the little child, Eppie, with the mischievous scissors, and punishment in the coal-hole by Silas Marner, all rounded off with another Ruthless Rhyme.

In Part Two, subtitled Real and Earnest, we saw and heard Tom and Maggie at Mr. Stelling’s school and heard reports of child Labour as a fact of Victorian life. The children from Henry Mayhew’s *London Labour* were allowed to speak for themselves in heart-rending fashion, and Charles Dickens remembered the blacking factory. High drama was introduced with Tom Tulliver’s demonstration of sword-play which might have rendered him lame like Philip Wakem, but his real sorrows came with the end of school and the end of childhood.

Rosalind Shanks and Gabriel Woolf, two seasoned performers, deserve the highest praise. Their voices blend perfectly; where accents are required they are moderate, and it is clear that they enjoy what they do. It was an evening, and a performance, to remember and to relish.

**Kathleen Porter**