

The Wild Child: Children are Freaks in Antebellum Novels

by

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Abstract

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This dissertation investigates the spectacle of antebellum freak shows and focuses on how Phineas Taylor Barnum's influence permeates five antebellum novels. The study concerns itself with wild children staged as freaks in *Margaret* by Sylvester Judd, *City Crimes* by George Thompson, *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe and *Our Nig* by Harriet Wilson. Barnum's influence was pervasive. The novels I investigate span a period of fourteen years before the Civil War, and offer a view of the kid show presented by the freaks in each text. Touching into spectacle, authors construct narratives and stage freaks in order to solidify boundaries that define insiders and outsiders. These works offer entertaining and didactic freaks to be gawked at and probed. As is usual with freak shows, the viewers/readers provide as much information about society and spectatorship in nineteenth century America, as do the freaks themselves.

Dedication

To my husband Thomas Heim and to our daughter Katelyn Marissa, thanks to you both for your love, support, and encouragement. I could not have done this without your patience and understanding. To my mother Kathleen T. Harley, your love of reading has shaped my career, and I wish you were here. I am forever grateful to my aunt, Monica Heffernan, for her unwavering belief in my ability to complete this dissertation. Heartfelt thanks go to my brother Bernard E. Harley whose insightful one-liners lightened the load.

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Introduction: The Wild Child As Freak in Antebellum Novels

This study of the wild child as freak in nineteenth-century American literature focuses on subversive children in novels to investigate how the penchant for spectacle influences authors' characterization of children in the texts. This work explores antebellum fiction through the lens of the wild child as sideshow entertainment. Until he or she is tamed, the wild child is viewed as a freak, in the Barnumesque sense, by a society addicted to carnivalesque entertainment and sensational newspaper stories. I offer a window through which the spectacle of the wild child can be viewed as an attempt to investigate the following questions: How is the wild child part of a larger conversation about freaks and sideshow exhibits in nineteenth-century American culture? How is the freak child a foil for the cherished child of the cult of domesticity? How does the wild child personify America? My methodology is historicist, as Bardes and Gossett explain: "Characteristically, fiction both confirms and enlarges historical knowledge gained from other sources" (4). Critical theories of gender, race and spectacle will be explored to uncover how and why the wild child is staged as if one of Phineas Taylor Barnum's freaks in the following novels: Sylvester Judd's *Margaret: A Tale of the Real and Ideal, Blight and Bloom* (1845), George Thompson's *City Crimes* (1849), Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), and Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig or Sketches from the Life of a Free Black* (1859). Children are freaks in these antebellum novels, and the respective authors stage a wild child to spark interest in the text. The authors ensure either a healing, a disappearing, or an escape act for the freak. Margaret's freakishness results in a democratic society, Jack and the Image are forgotten freaks, Pearl and Topsy are Christianized then exiled, and Frado through her own enfreakment supports herself.

Although the wild child in late nineteenth-century American fiction has attracted ample critical attention with such characters as Huckleberry Finn, Tom Sawyer, and Jo March to name a few, the prominence of this figure in pre-Civil War fiction has been largely neglected. This work explores how authors implement Phineas Taylor Barnum's successful entrepreneurial strategies to exhibit a wild child as freak in their respective texts, and then empower the freak with redemptive qualities so that she/he, in most cases, becomes a model citizen and a catalyst for the reader's redemption.

The wild child in antebellum novels is viewed as an outcast, orphan, cultural other, and freak for various reasons such as: poverty, aberrant behavior, race, gender, and dubious parentage. This child is purposely staged as a freak, much like Ragged Dick is in Horatio Alger's later fiction.¹ These freaks attract readers to the text, entertain them, and as the respective child in the text is educated, the readers are entertained, instructed, and elevated as the wild child progresses along the path of salvation.

Since many of these fictional texts were read by the whole family as *how to behave*, *how to live*, and *how to succeed* texts, what the child is being taught can be seen as what is valued in nineteenth-century American culture. Novel reading is the glue "holding America together,"² and the wild child in these texts can be studied as the naughty child that provides freak show entertainment within the didactic framework of the text, which is a mini portable museum. As Susan Stewart in *On Longing* states: "Hence for us the miniature appears as a metaphor for all books and all bodies" (44). The freak children are presented in novels, which are miniature American museums.

¹ Hildegard Hoeller, "Freaks and the American dream: Horatio Alger, P. T. Barnum, and the art of humbug," *Studies in American Fiction* 34.2 (2006): 189-214.

²David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Vintage, 1996) 309.

P.T. Barnum's American Museum in New York brought in crowds who enjoyed the acceptable educational venue of the museum, but who also wanted to see exotic, primitive, freak show exhibits where the sideshow intersected with educational artifacts.³ Americans were flocking to Barnum's Museum,⁴ at that same time American novels were being voraciously devoured by a literate society. It is not hard to see that what was bringing visitors to the museum,⁵ an educational institution that also displayed freaks, was attracting a similar audience to the novel wherein the wild child provided a parallel freak show experience. Barnum was quite proud of his American Museum and stated: "No one could go through the halls, as they were when they came under my proprietorship, and see one-half there was worth seeing in a single day; and then, as I always justly boasted afterwards, no one could visit my Museum and go away without feeling that he had received the full worth of his money" (*Struggles and Triumphs* 118). Similarly, novelists exhibiting their respective freaks promised entertainment and enlightenment to their patrons—readers.

The wild child is used as a didactic example of what *not* to do, but within the novel entertainment is necessary to pique the reader's interest keeping in mind this is the era of penny newspapers, and as Reynolds states: "Penny newspapers, aimed at the wallets and the tastes of America's increasingly rowdy working class,⁶ supplanted the respectable sixpennies of the past with a new brand of journalism that was brash, zestful and above all sensational" (174). So if the

³ Rachel Adams, *Sideshow U.S.A.: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination* (Chicago: U Chicago Press, 2001) 11.

⁴ A. H. Saxon, "P. T. Barnum and the American Museum": 38 million admission tickets were sold between 1841 and when the museum burned down twenty three years later. In 1865 the U.S. population was about 35 million (138).

⁵ David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination In the Age of Emerson and Melville* (New York: Knopf, 1998) 209. "...between 1842 and 1855, a period when America's population increased 80 percent, the number of American-authored novels increased by 800 percent, so that literature and book trade advanced at a rate ten times faster than that of population growth. By far the largest proportion of these native volumes, it was emphasized, were cheap sensational fiction" (209).

wild child entertainment is freaky enough, readers would entice others to purchase the novel, thereby ensuring good sales for the authors. It is clear that novelists utilize Barnum's tactics to entice readers, and employ the wild child's journey to educate those readers. A plaque in the John and Mable Ringling Museum in Sarasota Florida defines the sideshow experience: "The sideshow, which was sometimes called the 'kid show,' was the smallest of the three tents visitors could enter. Entry into the sideshow required a separate admission ticket from the rest of the circus experience. Men sold tickets from stands in front of the sideshow's entrance by yelling 'ballyhoo' that described the strange and marvelous sights to be seen for just a few cents." This sideshow event is mirrored within the novels discussed here. The "kid show" is the wondrous experience the reader undergoes in reading about the freak children and their antics, to which the separate purchase of the novel entitles them. The authors of these texts were in tune with the times and offered a novel circus experience with all its various facets. The freak children are barked by the novelists as the "ballyhoo" of the novel.

The freaks on display are not the only objects of curiosity. Although the reader is entertained by the wild child, the children in these texts interestingly provide fruitful information about the readers enjoying the circus text: "The price of admission buys permission to gaze at another's body with the expectation that the look of curiosity will be met by the 'blank, unseeing stare' essayist Joseph Mitchell attributes to the seasoned freak performer. But spectators may be disconcerted to find their gazes returned, often laden with resentment or hostility" (Adams 7). The wild child within these novels offers us a look back or a mirror of antebellum America with its cult of domesticity, attraction to freaks, and sensationalism.⁷

⁷ Jadviga Da Costa Nunes, "The Naughty Child in Nineteenth-Century American Art," *Journal of American Studies* 21.1 (1987): 225-47. "The creators of American culture often employed the metaphor of the child to define the status of the new nation, which, like a child, was energetically struggling to achieve self-definition and fulfillment" (227).

How is the wild child an outsider in terms of the cult of domesticity? The cherished child has loving parents, is wanted, and well behaved, unlike the wild child. Parents attempted to preserve the cherished child's youth—this was exclusively an event experienced by the cherished child, not the freak child. A framing device to ask about the wild child versus the cherished child is posed by Frado in *Our Nig* with her question to James Bellmont regarding God and who created his mother, Mrs. Bellmont: ““Did the same God that made her make me?”” When James responds that the same God made Frado *and* Mrs. Bellmont, Frado says: “Well, then, I don't like him” (28). The experience for the wild child versus the cherished child is similar to the life Frado lives in the Bellmont household as compared to Mary Bellmont's experience in that same house. In terms of experience, the freak child and the cherished child inhabit different spheres. Their lives are worlds apart even if they live in the same house. Although Pearl is prized as “. . . her mother's only treasure” (82), the child is ostracized as an anathema, and Hester is often frightened by the sprite. The community banishes mother and child to the forest's fringe, and never accepts the freak child. Pearl is abandoned and disowned by her father, who is also wary of the child and only acknowledges her moments before he dies. Pearl lives a very different life compared to other Puritan children. The freak child suffers social ostracism.

In the nineteenth century the public was disillusioned with hypocritical reformers, so called experts, confidence men, museum experts, and showmen who were all vying for the public's trust.⁸ Johnson in “That Guilty Third Tier” provides us with one example of mid-century religious hypocrisy: “. . . the Reverend Robert Turnbull was not nearly so indignant about the mere fact that prostitutes were allowed to use the theatre as he was about their being

⁸ Rachel Adams, *Sideshow U.S.A.* Adams explains that the boundaries between professional and amateur were blurred in the nineteenth century. “The still permeable boundaries between professional life scientist, amateur collector, and showman generated a war of words...” (46).

‘allowed to leave their appropriate place and invade the pit’” (578). The Reverend is more concerned about enjoying his theater experience uninterrupted than about sinners’ souls.

Prostitution is acceptable as long as they keep their place. And in “The Nose, the Lie, and the Duel in the Antebellum South,” Greenberg explains that Barnum was all about profit and turning words to his advantage: “Words were his instruments in pursuit of gain and not at all linked to honor or dishonor . . . When Bachman called his mermaid a fake, Barnum did not reach for his gun but instead thought of ways to turn the charge to his profit” (64). It is not about the truth, it is about how one can profit from an untruth. The commercialization of the self had begun.

In this moment of rapid industrialization and the marketability of everyone and everything, this study of the wild child offers a framework for exploring the tension between the cherished child of the cult of domesticity and the wild child in nineteenth-century American literature. How are the wild child and cherished child oxymoronic versions of each other and a microcosm of the experience of rich versus poor, free versus slave, white versus black and male versus female? This study investigates these questions of cherished child versus freak child in antebellum novels. As Reynolds states: “Hawthorne’s notion that the work of genius is the newspaper of its age applies even to some of the most apparently unconventional features of America’s classic literature” (*Beneath the American Renaissance* 169). Freaks are “unconventional features” in literature or wherever they are found. Investigating novels is important cultural work, which enables critics to view several novels as representative of an age—these novels are newspapers of their age. This study of five novels, fourteen years apart viewed through the lens of the sideshow freak, illustrates P.T. Barnum’s influence on writers and the American reading public. As Ronald and Mary Zboray in “Have You Read?” explain: “It is certain that the plethora of antebellum printed matter challenged people to be highly selective in

their choice of reading” (147). The antebellum reading public was “highly selective” and the texts chosen here represent religious utopian, city mystery, canonical, bestseller, and fictionalized autobiography; something for every “highly selective” reader. This unique cross section of novels spans 1845 through 1859 and captures a moment of reading history before the Civil War, and highlights the freak child. Although child freaks are an under-investigated topic this study enhances our understanding of antebellum America’s fascination with freaks; after the circus departed these literary freaks were carried home in the pages of novels people were reading. Richard Flint in “The CIRCUS in America” explains the importance of the circus to nineteenth century audiences: ““In the mid-nineteenth century, the circus grew from an essentially equestrian show to an opulent spectacle that was cause for a holiday whenever circus day occurred in rural America” (214). The circus evoked more excitement than the Fourth of July as Hamlin Garland recalled (Flint 232), so it is not hard to imagine that readers would insist on freaky entertainment in the novels they read at home, and authors taking a cue from Barnum, would satisfy that demand.

Chapter 1 Margaret: Redemptive Freak in the Peaceable Kingdom

“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.” (King James Version Isaiah 11:6)

Margaret begins this study of cherished child versus freak, and she is a heroine who starts as an outsider in every possible way. One reason Margaret, the heroine of Sylvester Judd’s novel, begins as a freak is because she is accepted seamlessly as one of nature’s wild animals. Judd highlights Margaret’s journey and allows the reader to experience her path towards Christianization. Margaret survives a tornado because she sleeps with a mother bear and its three cubs—she is accepted as the fourth cub! The Peaceable Kingdom imagery utilized by Judd

illustrates how Margaret assimilates into the world of wild animals, and is protected and cherished in a harsh landscape where others would surely be unwelcome or even killed.⁹ Judd shows that her wildness is that she truly is *one* with the untamed landscape; Margaret is a microcosm of wild America. When she is communing with the bear and its cubs, a hummingbird lands in its nest nearby and allows Margaret to inspect its eggs, and wild bees land on her but never sting her (19-20). Judd exhibits Margaret as a nature freak. Margaret has an open, loving, democratic heart, and although she has found a home with her adoptive family, her real journey is a quest for faith; she is not completely welcomed as one of the “civilized” community until she is Christianized in an unorthodox way by meeting Christ in a dream vision.

Margaret, similar to other wild child characters, is ostracized from society. She adorns herself with wild flowers in the same way the outcast Pearl in Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* does (163). Judd dresses Margaret in wilderness clothing: “She got running mosses, twin-flower vines, and mountain-laurel blossoms, which she wound about her neck and waist, and... looked into the water as a mirror.... She smiled and was smiled on in turn; she held out her hand, which was reciprocated by the fair spirit below...” (7-8). Both Margaret and Pearl try to cross over to that reverse mirror world where their respective doppelganger resides, but they cannot break through the boundary. Perhaps the double represents the cherished child in the cult of domesticity who inhabits a gentler inversed *other* world than the domain the freak child inhabits. Margaret understands the language of the woods—her heart beats in rhythm with nature. She is intelligent: “...the Master called Margaret and asked her to spell some words he put to her, which she did very correctly. ‘You must certainly have a new spelling-book,’ said he” (26).

⁹ Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance* 190. “The two most intriguing settings for the American writer were the frontier, with its wild landscape and often savage inhabitants, and the city, with its dark slums, horrid plagues, and criminal classes” (190).

Townspeople are jealous and angry that Margaret has obtained a book and are afraid she will become educated and not fit their image of her as a wild, uncouth, illiterate Injin freak (33).

Margaret is eventually Christianized and the townspeople who taunted her as a freak ultimately accept and admire her as a prophetess. At the end Judd has Margaret change the names of the hills, the land, and the walkways around the Pond from pagan to Christian names, like Mons Christi. Margaret is formally Christianized, so the landscape must reflect that change and she, Adam-like, christens the landscape and is seen as the founder of the new community at Mons Christi. Her home becomes an egalitarian society where men and women are equals and all religions are accepted as valid. The freak has metamorphosed into the cornerstone of an utopian society.

Judd initially stages Margaret as a freak, and her journey as an outsider enables her (and vicariously the reader) to become genuinely accepting of *all* outsiders whether their otherness is ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, or gendered. She exemplifies the belief that whatever a person's background, they have a place of welcome at the nation's table. The marble cross is erected at Mons Christi on July fourth leads the novel's heroine to be seen as much more than the protagonist in a bildungsroman; it enables her to exemplify the young, wild nation and its capacity to mature and come itself to be truly accepting of all others at the country's table, as the Declaration of Independence states.

Chapter 2 Monstrous Freaks: Jack the Prig and the Image in *City Crimes*

In his portrayal in *City Crimes* of the gleefully wicked five year old, Jack the Prig and his dwarfishly deformed brother the Image, George Thompson hurls a bomb at the cult of domesticity. Jack is every parent's nightmare child in the cult of domesticity. Jack's father, The Dead Man, is a heinous murderer, and Jack is his dream child because he wants to become a

demon just like his father. The members of *The Jolly Knights of the Round Table* hold their meetings in the suffocating, subterranean Dark Vaults beneath New York City, and The Dead Man and his son are cherished members of this ghoulish group. This chapter explores the naughty boy trope and the reason why Jack's and the Image's freakishness is more acceptable because of their gender.¹⁰

The way Thompson stages Jack the Prig is particularly disturbing because as MacLeod in "For the Good of the Country" explains, this is the time period when America was sheltering, nurturing, educating, cherishing, and protecting its children to ensure the advancement of the young republic, whereas the Dead Man guarantees that his sons, and by extension the country, will be utterly corrupt. The Dead Man exclaims that the happiest day of his life will be the day Jack commits his first murder (232). The Dead Man even tattoos Jack's chest with the image of a criminal dying on the gallows (200), which symbolizes the nefarious future he envisions for his young son. Jack and the Image are the exceptions to the rule that the wild child will become civilized, leave his freak status behind, join the mainstream society, and offer redemptive pathways to his readers. Jack and the Image embody Thompson's subversive view of the cult of domesticity. These "cherished children" instead of living in a warm, loving, supportive home, subsist in the putrid underbelly of the Dark Vaults where rat eaten bodies of men murdered by their father slowly decompose. The horribly deformed son, the Image, is caged in the vaults and is deprived sunlight and companionship. His parents keep him hidden, imprisoned, and out of sight.

The mother was given province over child rearing in the nineteenth century with the beginning of the cult of motherhood, yet there is no gentle, guiding, maternal presence shaping

¹⁰Nunes 225. She is commenting on nineteenth-century paintings: "Included among genre painter's repertory of stock American types was the figure of the 'naughty' child, which is to say, a child, almost always male, shown in the midst of some prank or mischievous or disobedient act" (225).

the boys' characters—their mother is abused, and was formerly married to Mr. Ross, whom the Dead Man murders. The Dead Man rapes Mrs. Ross, murders her twins by Mr. Ross, and makes Mrs. Ross his wife. The Dead Man's wife has given birth to two sons by him—the Image, a dwarf who never sees the light of day and dwells solely in the Dark Vaults, and the jolly criminal Jack the Prig. Jack's mother is the Dead Man's partner in crime and she is more like a vampire, as she threatens to drink the protagonist's blood, than a loving mother looking out for the welfare of her vulnerable sons (204).¹¹ The cherished child lives above ground, and the freakish wild child lives in the Dark Vaults beneath society's notice. Thompson is pointing out the lie that is the cult of domesticity in nineteenth-century America and the Image reflects Thompson's view of reality.

Chapter 3 Pearl: This Freak Mirrors Both Societies in *The Scarlet Letter*

Pearl of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* is simultaneously a reflection of Puritan and nineteenth century culture; as an outcast she occupies the interstices of these epochs. She is a freak constructed by her mother's sin, yet she kisses the ignominious scarlet letter and ensures her mother puts it back on when Hester casts it off in the forest (193-4). Pearl is dressed in exotic colors and richly embroidered outfits that Hester Prynne never wears herself. Pearl's costume, her home on the outskirts of civilized society, and the fact that she is variously staged as the devil's daughter and a soothing savior show that she fits the description of an oxymoronic staged freak with redemptive qualities.¹² The first time the community meets her, she is three months old and the town is given a half holiday so that it can witness the sideshow spectacle of

¹¹ Mary P. Ryan, *The Empire of the Mother : American Writing About Domesticity 1830-1860* (New York: Harrington, 1985) 56. The care of children was transferred from the father to the mother. "Between 1830 and 1850 the custody of the children was transferred directly and officially from male to female," (56) yet George Thompson has The Dead Man clearly in charge of his son Jack's "development." It is another topsy-turvy image in the text.

¹² Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance* 124. "We have seen that Hawthorne had long regarded reformers as symbols of doubleness, as man's ability to behave simultaneously as an angel and a demon" (124).

Hester Prynne's, and by association Pearl's, shame on the scaffold. Pearl and Hester are on the scaffold stage for three hours while all the townspeople gaze at the child of sin as they would at one of Barnum's freaks (50).

Hawthorne constructs Pearl as one of Barnum's freaks, but complicates her character to illustrate that she has curative, redemptive qualities; she helps save her parents' souls because she is a living reminder and embodiment of their sin; she helps Dimmesdale to do what he *has* to do--publicly admit that he is her father. Before Dimmesdale acknowledges her, Pearl is variously known as: a demon offspring, wild, a sprite, an elf, a possessed being. After Dimmesdale confesses, acknowledges, and kisses his daughter, the spell is broken: "Pearl's errand as a messenger of anguish was all fulfilled" (233), and she would no longer be a freak but, "... would grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor forever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it" (233). Pearl becomes the richest heiress of the day when Chillingworth leaves her his fortune (237). She understandably leaves the community, marries, and later in the novel Hester is seen making baby clothing presumably for Pearl's child—the journey from freak to redemptive catalyst is complete for the reader—Pearl enjoys a successful life elsewhere. Exposing hidden sin is the stepping-stone to salvation and forgiveness and Hawthorne's utilization of Pearl's freakish behavior entertains and enables readers to experience a morally corrective journey. Pearl, unlike Margaret in Judd's novel, does not remain in the community but journeys abroad; her life is a success story as she marries and becomes a mother, and keeps in touch with Hester. The journey from freak to exile is complete.

Chapter 4 Topsy-Turvy Freaks in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Topsy is staged as ethnographic freak or “primitive exotic”¹³ in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Topsy provides minstrel show entertainment and leaves her audience “open-mouthed” and filled with wonder because of her wild behavior, ragged clothing, and amazing antics. She has no knowledge of God, her parents, where she comes from, or even how old she is. She is Christianized with little Eva’s help—the cherished child in the cult of domesticity--and after Eva’s death Topsy cries and says that no one else on earth loves her (321). Topsy says she wishes that she was never born because she does not see any point to her life. It is then that the northerner Miss Ophelia tells Topsy that she will love and teach her. Miss Ophelia proclaims she has learned that much from Eva’s love; she has learned what being a Christian means. Miss Ophelia helps tame the wild child and enables Topsy to become a contributing member of society. Topsy, because she is loved by Eva—the quintessential cherished child--shows other characters like Miss Ophelia and Mr. St. Clare that slaves should be treated equitably and humanely. Topsy is the tool to others’ salvation and she is used by Stowe to engage the reader in a larger conversation about slavery and the country’s “higher law”¹⁴ to aid, educate, Christianize, and enable slaves to become productive members of society, just as Topsy does. Reynolds in *Mightier than the Sword* explains that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was a force in awakening the country’s consciousness to the evils of slavery. He states: “This books shows that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was central to redefining American democracy on a more egalitarian basis,” (4) and that is just what Topsy’s character, as staged by Stowe, accomplishes. She

¹³ Adams, *Sideshow U.S.A.* Figure 3 details: “An ethnographic freak...The man’s wide-eyed expression, tribal costume, and abundant props create an impression of primitive exoticism” (29). See also A.H. Saxton’s “P.T. Barnum and the American Museum” for a discussion of staged “ethnographic” freaks (137).

¹⁴ David S. Reynolds, *Mightier than the Sword: Uncle Tom’s Cabin and the Battle for America* (New York: Norton, 2011) 218. “Stowe was the leading popularizer of higher law—held by those who looked beyond the Constitution or the Fugitive Slave Law to the law of natural justice, supported by God and morality—which its advocates considered more sacred than any human statute” (118).

undergoes a metamorphosis because of Eva's kindness, love and gentle guidance, which enables her to become a productive Christian member of society and to illustrate that America too, can work to successfully reenact Topsy's triumph with other slaves in the country. Brodhead in *Cultures of Letters* explains that Topsy represents much more than a character in a novel: "... Topsy is here made to embody not just the slave child but really *the* child, as the paradigmatic case of the disciplinary object..." (38), in nineteenth century America. This freak child's reflects America's slavery façade. Topsy like Pearl is exiled; the freak turned missionary is teaching in Africa.

Chapter 5 Freaky Frado.

Like Topsy, Frado is staged in the novel as an ethnic other in Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*. Although Frado is free, she is mixed racially and considered monstrous by her cruel guardian Mrs. Bellmont because she sticks up for herself, and is popular at entertaining her classmates in school. Mrs. Bellmont, Frado's mistress, ensures Frado is removed from school when she is only nine. Mrs. Bellmont does not allow Frado to wear any protective skin-covering because Frado is beautiful and could potentially pass as white, so Mrs. Bellmont insists on enhancing her marginalized position by darkening her skin: "At home, no matter how powerful the heat...she was never permitted to shield her skin from the sun" (22). Harriet Wilson stages herself as Frado in this autobiographical novel to make her point about the religious, abolitionist, and northern hypocrisy she witnessed firsthand. Frado, the seemingly irreligious one, is shown to be a superior Christian and more humane and maternal than the white, supposedly Christian, Mrs. Bellmont. It is Frado's protector, James Bellmont and Frado herself, who are the Little Evas of this novel, and James suffers a similar fate. James attempts to protect Frado, but he is predictably ineffectual and dies leaving Frado in the hands of his monstrous mother who whips

her unmercifully and almost kills her; Frado is nearly worked to death in the novel (56). And as Richard Brodhead explains, whipping is a metaphor for slavery: "...whipping *means* slavery" (14), and Frado's depiction of herself is part of a larger conversation about America's culpability in allowing free born racially mixed children to be whipped and abused in the North. Harriet Wilson is happy to inform the readers that she outlives all her tormentors and ironically as the "silenced one" has the last word—she gets to tell the story, publish her history, and hold up a mirror to the Belmont family and antebellum society in general. She enables readers to see that slavery in America is not just a southern "problem." Wilson puts on a freak show wherein she is the main attraction.

In *Beneath the American Renaissance* Reynolds states that Melville studied oxymoronic characters and believed it helped him sound the depths of his country: "Melville evidently believed that by studying these paradoxical figures he was getting to the core of America itself, a nation he described in *Israel Potter* as 'civilized in the externals but a savage at heart'" (279). These wild child characters are also oxymoronic—they are freak saviors or freaks seeking salvation, but unlike Melville's characters, they are savage in the externals and civilized at heart. They provide the "kid show" in the novel.

Chapter 1 Margaret: Redemptive Freak in the Peaceable Kingdom

The meeting in the woods was the first in order of time. This practice, imported from England, began to flourish incipiently in our country. From the suburbs of old cities, from church-yards, court-yards, gardens, the scene was transferred to pine forests, shady mountains, and a maiden greensward... What lived in Europe must needs luxuriate in America. (*Margaret* 48).

This chapter will place Sylvester Judd's *Margaret: A Tale of the Real and Ideal, Blight and Bloom* published in 1845, in its freak show context, introduce close readings of the text to illustrate that Margaret is staged as a Barnumesque freak and becomes a redemptive, transformative force in Livingston society, and highlight Judd's contribution to American literature through his utilization of Phineas Taylor Barnum's showman techniques. Sylvester Judd offers the town of Livingston as an exemplar of what all towns in America can become if an egalitarian system is established in the budding republic. This truly democratic system must be a model where all people, including those considered freaks are universally accepted as integral parts of the whole, where they can thrive, buoy up the economy, and enable the community and country to prosper. Livingston's transformation is enabled through the workings of the freak child, Margaret.

The eponymous protagonist follows her heart and journeys from being the wild Indian freak at the Pond to the economic and spiritual savior of the fictitious town of Livingston. Margaret Hart is adopted and raised by a family of drunks residing at Indian Head, where she is shown to be primordially connected to nature, and where she blossoms like a rare flower in a bed of weeds. Her foundation and strength are the wild beauty of the Pond and its surroundings wherein she uncovers God and founds Mons Christi an utopian society and a model American town. She finds kindred spirits at the Pond and in town whether these friends be trees, flowers, bears, bees, or misfits. Once she is caught in a tornado and a large tree collapses around her; she remains unscathed and unperturbed because the tree falls intentionally and maternally, to

surround and protect this American wild child within its loving embrace. Until she is rescued by a *human* search party, a mother bear with cubs shelters and nourishes the human cub. Judd's protagonist is first and foremost a child of the American wilderness, and although she is staged as a freak she becomes the savior of the town. Margaret does not lose herself by melting into mainstream society; she is powerful enough to redirect society, causing the heart, soul, and center of the town of Livingston to shift to the once marginalized Indian Head, known as the Pond in the novel. Margaret--the wild Injin freak--is the catalyst for the metamorphosis that takes place spiritually, geographically, and economically in her community.

Judd's seminal work can be viewed as an inspirational prequel for later canonical texts. Margaret is not just a romantic wild child as the Wordsworthian influenced wild child experiences a falling away and a sense of loss and is retrospective: "It's all downhill from the first breath: to grow is to lose sacred childhood innocence . . ." (23).¹⁵ However, Margaret is a self starter, forward looking, fiercely independent and in many ways the caretaker of her family and community; she personifies the young optimistic country and offers a developmental roadmap, which other towns in America can emulate to ensure a successful community. Temperance, an issue with which Margaret's adoptive family grapples, and an issue facing the country is dealt with in the text. At one point Margaret has to decide between purchasing food or purchasing rum. She is afraid to return home without her father's rum and discusses getting the food and rum on credit with the store clerk who says to her: "I tell you, we can't and won't trust you. Your drunken dad has run up a long chalk already. Look there, I guess you know enough to count twelve, twelve gallons he owes now. You are all a haggling, gulching, good-for-nothing

¹⁵ Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: NYU Press, 2011) 24. "The childhood constructed by romantics and sentimentalists, too, is defined by loss and consternated memory. . . Childhood is therefore best understood as an act of surrogation that compensates for losses incurred through growth" (24).

crew” (38). Margaret’s encounter with an Indian man and his granddaughter highlights Judd’s awareness of contemporary moral issues not just of temperance but of Indian removal as well. Margaret’s biological father, Gottfried Bruckmann is an immigrant and Judd’s magnanimous treatment of immigrants is shown through his portrayal of this important character. Judd’s book is similar to his sermons, which included such topics of the day. How Judd stages Margaret throughout the text is influenced by P. T. Barnum’s freak show exhibits. Judd’s belief in initiating young children into the Christian faith is emphasized to explain how and why the freak Margaret is the teacher, the voice of Christ, and the vessel of Judd’s important message in the novel.

Freak child as prophet:

“Why have not Christian theological ideas been realized in nations professedly Christian? Simply because Christianity does not begin with the cradle. But the gospel did, in fact, originally embrace the children. Christ, if I may so say, laid the foundations of his kingdom in the heart of childhood” (13-14).¹⁶

This chapter will place Sylvester Judd’s *Margaret* published in 1845 in its historical context and review some criticism of Judd’s work, highlight Margaret’s freak status, and show P.T. Barnum’s influence on how the protagonist is presented. The novel builds on the Reverend Sylvester Judd’s religious beliefs, and as the protagonist is a young girl from whom we learn the true ways of God, we can see Judd’s vision of children being indoctrinated early into the faith followed throughout the work. Judd utilizes Margaret as a freak child prophet and his text is a harbinger for many works that have come to define American literature such as Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden*, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, and Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* to name a few. Judd’s work can be understood as the

¹⁶ Sylvester Judd, “The Birthright Church: A Discourse By The Late Rev. Sylvester Judd of Augusta Maine,” Boston: Crosby, Nichols, & Company, 111, Washington Street. 1853.

foundation for these canonical texts as he voices his sermons through his protagonist, Margaret. *Margaret* answers the clarion call for a new American literature. Gavin Jones in “The Paradise of Aesthetics” explains that Hawthorne believed Judd’s book to be “intensely” American:

In 1854, English writer and politician R. Monckton Milnes asked Nathaniel Hawthorne to select a few books he considered most characteristically American. Along with Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* (1854), Hawthorne sent his friend Sylvester Judd’s *Margaret: A Tale of the Real and Ideal, Blight and Bloom* (1845), even though he doubted that Milnes would be able to appreciate the novel precisely because it was so “intensely” American. (449)

Hawthorne’s words suggest that it is difficult for a non-American to grasp the essence of this “intensely” American novel. Margaret, Judd’s freak hero, explores the landscape and identifies foliage around the Pond as does Thoreau in *Walden*. Being at the Pond is a transcendental experience for Margaret as is shown when she states: “...though I could not reach the bottom of the Pond, I saw the heavens in it, and myself sailing above them” (234). Margaret always sees herself as a nature insider, and an outsider in the town.

Similarly,¹⁷ Margaret frequently describes herself as sprouting from a tree: “I was an acorn once” (9), and she also sees herself as a leaf, and these descriptions predate Whitman’s 1855 pivotal work *Leaves of Grass*. After she and her future husband survive small pox, she discusses how the event has changed her: “The trees have a sympathy with me. I am but a mottled forest. These last weeks have unfolded all my colors. You say you sketch sometimes,

¹⁷ Sylvester Judd, *Margaret*. Rose’s story in the book, could have been the source for Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter* because Rose is shunned by society after being seduced by the unscrupulous Raxman; because of her crime Rose says she was: “...condemned to stand in the pillory with a rope on my neck, and have a significant red letter sewed to my back” (290), which is almost identical to Hester Prynne’s punishment in Hawthorne’s subsequent novel.

you cannot carry me away in your portfolio, I shall only allow you a leaf. I must grow green again” (285). Later in the novel Margaret describes the reaction she has to her husband’s voice when she says: “I vibrate to his voice” (437). And a line that pre-echoes Whitman occurs when Christ is described in the novel: “He, the prototypal Diapason of the race, studying himself, and man in himself, so strikes a chord that vibrates to every heart” (258). Jones explains Judd’s influence on Whitman: “Judd and Whitman share the same range to record all elements of the poet’s experience, the same democratic morality of vision...” (453). Margaret, helps define what is “intensely American” about America—namely our vast wilderness. Although the community treats Margaret as a freak, she eventually becomes the most important insider and the moral compass of the flourishing community of Livingston. Through her freak status Margaret shakes up the town, shows them what is right, and redirects the old ways to allow a more democratic community to flourish.

To understand the protagonist of Judd’s work, it is important to know the author and his views on contemporary issues. The Reverend Sylvester Judd, author of *Margaret*, *Richard Edney* a long narrative poem, “Philo” a roman a clef, and the unfinished blank verse tragedy *The White Hills*,¹⁸ was a Christian minister who believed everything God made was good: “Holy and delightful is the Earth! God saw that every thing he had made was very good” (456).¹⁹ Jeffrey Meyers explains: “For Blake, as for Whitman, ‘everything in life was holy,’ materialism was anathema . . .” (761). Blake, Judd and Whitman are writers on a similar continuum. In a letter to his brother J.W. dated March 24, 1837 Judd describes his views on the good he sees around him:

¹⁸ Leonard Neufeldt rev of *Sylvester Judd* by Francis B. Desmond. *New England Quarterly* 54.3 (1981): 444-447.

¹⁹ Judd, *Margaret* 456.

When God looked down upon the works of his creation, the heavens, the earth, man, all living creatures, he pronounced them *good*. I now look upon the sun and moon and stars, and find them adapted to good. I look upon the earth, and find it adapted to good: even its hurricanes, its earthquakes, its ocean-storms, are all for good. I find the beasts, the birds, the insects, all for good. I look upon man in his physical frame, and find all adapted to good.... I look upon the intellectual system, and find it adapted to good.... So far, all conspires to good, and to the highest happiness of man and the glory of God. (88-9)²⁰

Sylvester Judd takes stock of all around him and chooses to focus on the positive and write about nature as uplifting and healing and that what readers experience reading *Margaret*. Although the protagonist is ridiculed as a freak, she heals herself and others through the beauty and goodness of nature.

Judd was born in Westhampton, Massachusetts and after graduating from Yale and undergoing a change in faith, he left his Calvinist beliefs behind, attended Harvard Divinity School, and became a Unitarian minister. He lived in Augusta, Maine, where he wrote *Margaret* (151).²¹ He published the book anonymously, but it soon became known that Reverend Judd was the author. He was a loving husband and father and deeply concerned for the moral development of his immediate family, his extended family—his parishioners, and his countrymen. In a review of *Life and Character of the Rev. Sylvester Judd* by Hall it states of Judd: “He longed to do whatever lay in his power to make home and all its relations attractive, to make life holy and beautiful, to make Christ and his religion, and especially his Church, living and divine agencies in the world, removing social wrongs and individual sins, bringing men into

²⁰ Arethusa Hall, *Life and Character of the Reverend Sylvester Judd* (Boston: D. C. Colesworthy, 1857) 88-9.

²¹ Grant Loomis, “Sylvester Judd’s New England Lore,” *Journal of American Folklore* 60.236 (1947): 151-8.

a more harmonious and perfect union with God, with nature, and with one another” (427).²² *Margaret* is Judd’s attempt to preach his message of Christ’s love to his larger parish--his readers and his countrymen. Judd believed in seeing God’s hand in *all* of nature, and sympathized with the uncouth, freakish elements in human behavior. Grant Loomis suggests that his popularity did not stand the test of time: “The name of Sylvester Judd (1813-1853) flashed across the world of American letters for a few shining moments in the decade from 1845-1855” (151). Another critic, the author of the preface to the illustrated 1856 edition *Compositions in Outline by Felix O.C. Darley from Judd’s Margaret*, readily conceded some flaws in Judd’s narrative, but suggested it *will* stand the test of time: “The volume arrested the attention of the thoughtful and inquiring, and, in spite of many easily-discovered defects, presented, to those versed in the knowledge of the literature which endures, numerous materials of permanent attention” (1). *Margaret* is a treasure trove of antebellum literature wherein the seeds that influenced later famous authors have been sown.

Judd explained the plot of *Margaret*: “‘Margaret’ is a tale not of outward movement, but of internal development” (qtd. in Jones 453). He has been credited with writing beautiful, spiritual, deeply affecting novels that immerse the reader in nature.²³ Nature for Judd was not only healing and awe inspiring, but a place to discover God and be forgiven by Christ. One 1855 review of his biography, *Life and Letters of the Rev. Sylvester Judd* by Arethusa Hall discusses Judd: “When we have once seen him as he was in his family, and in his relations to the religious society with which he was connected, we know better how to appreciate and enjoy his writings, which we cannot but regard as in their department among the richest, most original, and most valuable contributions that have been made to our peculiarly American literature. For peculiarly

²² Review of *Life and Character of the Rev. Sylvester Judd*, *North American Review* 80.167 (1855): 420-439.

²³ Review of *Life and Character of the Rev. Sylvester Judd*. 422.

American they are” (422). It is noteworthy that Philip Judd Brockway in “Sylvester Judd: Novelist of Transcendentalism” uses the word “peculiar” to describe Judd’s contribution to New England literature: “This peculiar contribution to the literature of New England...” (654). And yet another untitled review of Judd’s biography by Arethusa Hall in *The North American Review* 1855 alludes to peculiarities in Judd’s work: “He had as both his biography and his writings prove, marked peculiarities of mind and character. But they who are admitted through the memoir to the inmost recesses of his spirit may see how childlike in its simplicity his life was, how lofty and how single were his aims, and how thoroughly devoted he was to the highest interests of man and the advancement of Christ’s kingdom on earth” (422). Clearly there is something peculiar about how Judd deals with issues of the day, and gives voice to America’s literature through Margaret. Certainly, in terms of how the town views her, there is something peculiar about the freak child Margaret. She is wild; she sleeps with wild animals; she wanders by herself in the wilderness; she is called a wild Indian; she is the town’s freak, and Judd utilizes her to deliver his message. Margaret is the freak prophet clearing the path for American heroes to blaze new trails, not only in the wilderness, but through a more democratic acceptance of others. Barnum discusses his calling in providing intriguing curiosities to be experienced in his museum: “This is a trading world, and men, women and children, who cannot live on gravity alone, need something to satisfy their gayer, lighter moods and hours, and he who ministers to this want is in a business established by the Author of our nature” (*Struggles and Triumphs* 72). Sylvester Judd and P.T. Barnum do God’s work. Judd is in the business of ministering through *Margaret*; this book is similar to Barnum’s museum in that here too peculiar curiosities are displayed.

What one could point to as peculiarly American about *Margaret* is that the protagonist's pilgrimage in the wilderness mirrors the journey of the young country--*Margaret* is America's bildungsroman. Judd explains his design: "It [the novel] would give body and soul to the divine elements of Christianity. It aims to subject bigotry, cant, pharisaism, and all intolerance. Its basis is Christ...." (qtd. in *Life and Character of the Rev. Sylvester Judd* 420). The issues with which the country is grappling: temperance, immigration, Indian removal, self definition--in short, the moral development and advancement of the country--are in Judd's novel as he seeks to eradicate bigotry and intolerance;²⁴ at the end a more egalitarian society exists and this utopian state is what Judd envisions for America. Margaret, a poor orphaned Indian freak, encounters Christ in her dreams and become the founding stone of her community. Similarly, America was characterized as a wild lawless place in European society and Americans were viewed as uncouth, barbaric outsiders, yet America comes to be the envy of all other nations. This novel is Judd's dream for the nascent country's future and that vision is delivered by the freak prophet.

Keeping the country's moral development uppermost in his mind, Sylvester Judd was an engaged reformer who preached tolerance to his parishioners and was keenly aware of issues of the day: "He delivered courses of lectures to his flock and others at lyceums and elsewhere, in various places, choosing for his themes topics of the day, as war, temperance, education, prison discipline, punishment, and the like, on all which he was an enthusiastic reformer. Lighter topics illustrating the beauty and happiness of daily life also engaged his attention" (4).²⁵ All these

²⁴ Lyon N. Richardson, Rev. of *American Dreams: A Study of American Utopias* by Vernon L. Parrington, *American Literature* 21.4 (1950): 500-502. "Later, and among others, Dr. Parrington treats pleasantly of Sylvester Judd, whose *Margaret* (1845) presents a Unitarian world and whose ideals led him to oppose slavery and to support prison reform, temperance, women's rights, and transcendentalism" (502).

²⁵ *Compositions in Outline by Felix O.C. Darley from Judd's Margaret Engraved by Konrad Huber* (Redfield: New York 34 Beekman St. New York, N. Triibuer & C London 1856).

issues are addressed in *Margaret*. He creates the town of Livingston, and allows a young misfit adopted by the wild Indians at the Pond, to teach the reader, her community, and to grow into a deeply spiritual woman activist who is responsible for economically elevating her hometown and simultaneously bringing people to Christ. Margaret illuminates corruption in the town's prison system by visiting a murderer even before she attends church—a true Christian deed is to visit the outcasts of the town. By the end of the novel crime is veritably eradicated in Livingston.

She has an encounter with an Indian chief and his granddaughter and watches the Indian commit suicide while holding his granddaughter; he takes the child with him on his death plunge because he believes their way of life has vanished. There is a fire, which the Indian chief—a direct descendant of King Philip—informs Margaret that her older brother Hash started. Hash, drunk as usual, falls asleep and his pipe starts the conflagration. The Indian chief calls Margaret “Daughter of the Beautiful” (352). He wants Margaret to take and keep the precious Heron's Wreath he offers her, which she does. He also gives her permission to remain on the land of his forefathers, so that Margaret is not seen as a trespasser; she has the chief's permission to take possession of the land. His time has gone, but he gives her the right to remain at Indian Head and to keep and care for his ancestors' lands: “Take this land, this hill, these woods, these waters, they are yours. Sometimes in your love, your happiness, your power, remember the poor Indians!” (352). Judd in this one scene brings to light the suffering of the Indians and has the wild Indian freak, Margaret, rightfully inherit the Indian's land, not forcefully take it away. The Cherokees were removed from their land in Georgia by the 1830 Removal Act, and this was part of the American consciousness throughout the nineteenth century. Emerson wrote to President Van Buren regarding this issue; people were concerned that the Cherokees were not being dealt

with equitably, although they were acting as model citizens.²⁶ Maddox in *Removals* states: “...the public discussion of issues raised by the case continued, in various forms, throughout most of the rest of the nineteenth century, and its effects were still being felt at the end of the century” (16). It is apparent that Judd felt this incident was also a moral issue, as Emerson did, and he rewrites a similar event in his novel allowing Margaret to take lawful, moral possession of the land surrounding the Pond with the Indian chief’s permission. The wild child, viewed as an Indian freak by the townspeople, is the rightful possessor of the land. She is a female freak who later becomes the most influential person in the town. In tribute to the Indian chief, Margaret erects a much visited shrine to the Indian and his granddaughter, and it becomes as well traveled as Thomas à Becket’s shrine in England, which inspired Chaucer’s famous tales—we too have shrines to slaughtered martyrs—in this case the displaced and decimated Indians. The end of *Margaret* employs epistles, and the shrine is detailed in a letter from Margaret to her friend Anna:

This suggests to me that the remains of Pakanawket and his grandchild, after reposing so long in the depths of the Pond, at last rose to the surface. We had them buried in the woods which he pointed out as the home of his grandfather; and over them we put an antique monument of red sand-stone, on which are sculptured their effigies in the style of the Middle Ages. In the darkest woods they lie, but their shrine has as many visitors as that of Thomas à Becket. What more, what better could we do? (432)

Surely much more could have been done to aid the Indian cause, but in a penitential, redemptive, healing move Judd advances his narrative with a deep bow to the Indian chief and his

²⁶ Lucy Maddox, *Removals: Nineteenth-Century American Literature & the Politics of Indian Affairs* (New York: Oxford UP, 1991) 16. “When Ralph Waldo Emerson heard that the federal government had determined to remove the Cherokees by force, he wrote to Present Van Buren that ‘a crime is being projected that confounds our understandings by its magnitude’” (16).

granddaughter and puts their shrine on par with one of the greatest martyrs in literary history enabling the country to acknowledge its mistake and progress. The chief and his granddaughter surface from the depths of the pond, are recognized, enshrined, and worshipped. The pair is immortalized by Margaret, whose own freakishness in the novel is being associated with wild Indians. She is the freak who saves a community; childhood is an interesting, educative site as Sophia Bell in “Naughty Child” explains: “Rhetorically linking childhood and ‘Indianness,’ Apess makes childhood a site for learning, or ingeniously unlearning, white racism” (59). Margaret’s statue attempts to re-envision and heal the Indian troubles thereby unlearning white racism against American Indians. An example of some of this racism in children’s books is found in *Peter Parley’s Universal History* 1837, Samuel Goodrich teaches children the following: “Our American Indians, some of the negroes of Africa, some of the inhabitants of Asia, and most of the Oceanians, are savages” (24). Through her encounter with the chief and his granddaughter and through the erection of the elegant statue memorializing them, the freak prophet Margaret helps readers by providing another version of history.

The destructive fire Pakanawket refers to is caused by Hash’s drunkenness. Temperance issues are raised in a moral reform way. Alcohol is destructive: drunkenness causes emotional damage in Margaret’s family and environmental damage to the beautiful landscape of Livingston and Indian Head. Interestingly, the fire burns down the church, jailhouse and other buildings in the town and there is a sense that the fire is in one way a fortunate occurrence as it cleanses the town of corrupt, dusty, antiquated institutions and makes way for new more modern structures and ideas.

It is noteworthy, in terms of Judd’s own beliefs regarding children as capable vessels of religious ideals, that Margaret is singled out by the Indian chief as the rightful heir to the land.

With all the other options available to Judd in terms of heroes (he could have chosen the Indian chief, the ministers in the town, the jailer or one of Margaret's brothers), one might question why Judd chose a girl as the mouthpiece of reformation in the novel. In a letter to his mother quoted in Arethusa Hall's biography of Judd, he discusses how women are more accepting and easier to talk to than men: "There is but little of the genuine emotion in ours. The habits of men are too commercial and restrained, too bustling and noisy, too ambitious and repellant, for the cultivation of those nice sensibilities on which a true friendship rests. Women are the bonds of society, and the conservating principle in human intercourse" (146). Judd believed females were a more perfect vessel for communication than males and so his evangelist in the novel is the freak child, Margaret. She leads by example and is a nonthreatening hero.

Judd upends the patriarchal hierarchy and has the child the most powerful force in the novel, and the child is a symbol of the young American republic. Child rearing philosophies also advocated the supremacy of the child as Garlitz explains: "Certainly, one such parent was Bronson Alcott, who was so firm a believer in the child's divinity . . . Almost as soon as Louisa could walk she was allowed to roam freely about Boston. . . (645). Other writers recognized the genius in Judd's writing. "Margaret Fuller praised Judd's work as evidence that 'an American literature is possible even in our day'; and James Russell Lowell spoke of *Margaret* in terms that anticipated Herman Melville's call for a truly national literature. . . Lowell identified the distinctively American quality of *Margaret* as its deep moral concern for the new nation's new 'social order'" (Jones 449). Judd places the freak profit at the top of the hierarchy. Judd's works have been described as "...religious romances or Christian transcendental novels,"²⁷ and he

²⁷ Loomis, "Sylvester Judd's New England Lore," "Judd's ideas are preserved chiefly in two long, discursive effusions which have been designated as religious romances or Christian transcendental novels" (151). *Margaret* and *Richard Edney and the Governor's Family*.

ensures that his detailed descriptions of the Pond are accurate and that the novel has a moral message for the reader. The beauty of the landscape mirrors his moral teaching. Loomis credits Judd's exacting research: "*Margaret* is a storehouse of early lore and language for the folklorist and linguist" (152-3). Judd's contributions, like Thoreau's, augment future generations' understanding of New England and its history. The author was deeply concerned with accurately preserving the time period about which he was writing. He researched actual characters and fashioned the Widow Wright in the novel after an herbalist who lived then. Judd wrote to his father when he was working on the memoir²⁸ to request that his father seek out all kinds of books: primers, reading books, school-books, books about the dress and dialogue so that he could accurately depict the people and capture a moment in the young country's history.²⁹ Judd wanted to preserve the country's history from the war of independence through the turn of the nineteenth century.³⁰ Livingston, where the work is set, transforms from a flawed, corrupt, hypocritical society, to a veritable utopia with the help of a freak. It is not hard to see that one desirous of painstakingly preserving history would embody Barnum's techniques in characterizing his hero. Margaret embodies issues of the day and Judd is similar to Barnum in that they were both in the preservation business. Barnum after acquiring Scudder's Museum attempts to make it the best museum in the world. He preserves the nucleus of the old museum but modernizes and markets the new establishment with novel attractions. Judd's text is his museum, and that which is to be preserved is the wilderness of America; his innovative attraction is a freak prophet who preaches to his readers. As Judd uses Margaret to enact his sermons,

²⁸ *Life and Character of the Rev. Sylvester Judd North American Review* 80.167 (1855): 422. "But they who through the memoir are admitted to the inmost recesses of his spirit may see how childlike in its simplicity his life was, how lofty and how single were his aims, and how thoroughly devoted he was to the highest interests of man and the advancement of Christ's kingdom on earth" (422).

²⁹ Loomis 151.

³⁰ Loomis 152.

Barnum too took up moral issues of the day as, “His youthful zeal for civil liberties was followed by participation in temperance crusades and advocacy of abolition. He toyed with the women’s rights movement and after the Civil War took up the cudgels against corporate monopoly” (Harris 18). Barnum engaged in preaching for profit, “. . . for Barnum learned early that crusading was good for business” (Harris 18). Neither Judd nor Barnum sidestepped controversial topics.

Textual Evidence of Freakishness:

“Margaret shrieked and cried to the top of her voice, which sounded for the instant like a clarion over an earthquake” (51).

When Margaret ventures to town to acquire supplies for her parents a boy yells: “Moll Hart...A Pond Gal...An Injin, an Injin” (35). She is frequently called pejorative names by the children; her hat, clothing, shoes and parents are critiqued. When she accompanies her brother Nimrod to a camp meeting in the woods, the preacher asks Margaret if she is afraid: “‘You are not one of the wicked children that reviled the prophet, and the bears came out of the woods and tare them in pieces?’ Margaret responds: “‘I an’t afraid of bears.’” Mistress Palmer is shocked by this statement and says of Margaret: “‘A mazed child! a mazed child!’” (53). Margaret leaves people with an impression of wonder and dread. Although she is chastised, she remains strong. The preacher says of Margaret: “The devil is in that child, take her away” (54). Margaret is called an Injin, she is pronounced possessed, and she has magical powers. She divines water as she is “...endowed with this rare gift...” (56). Because she does this “...Margaret became a wonder” (58). Margaret’s singing calms fighters. Her brother Chilion gets her to sing at the Thanksgiving ball, and she calms the quarrellers (68). People are simultaneously filled with wonder and awe when they think of Margaret. When her brother Chilion is condemned to be executed, she clings to him and then “... raised herself aloft,

extended her arms, and with a startling intonation cried out..." (334). Margaret collapses after this outbreak and is carried out "...through the gaping and awe-stricken crowd" (334). Margaret, the freakish outsider, is one of Livingston's curiosities.

Judd's description of the protagonist in the opening chapter illustrates that at birth Margaret is the common child. He states of the protagonist: "It is God's own child, as all children are" (3). The universality of this child is driven home as Judd asks the reader if the child is a princess, a pauper or whether the child lives near the Thames, the Amazon or the Mississippi. A black-cap bird is said to fly over this child, and the author explains this species inhabits every part of the globe (3-4). In a posthumously published sermon entitled: "*The Birthright Church: A Discourse By The Late Rev. Sylvester Judd of Augusta Maine*, Judd explains that the globe is divvied up by religions: "Geographers divide the world by its religions; and you will find, on looking at a map of the globe, that the most important distinctions are those determined by theological causes" (5). In the same sermon Judd discusses a weakness in Christianity namely that Christian children are not rigorously taught about their religion, as children of other religions are. He believed it was detrimental to underestimate the capability of Christian children to internalize church tenants. He says: "Why have not Christian theological ideas been realized in nations professedly Christian? Simply because Christianity does not begin with the cradle. But the gospel did, in fact, originally embrace the children. Christ, if I may so say, laid the foundations of his kingdom in the heart of childhood" (13-14). Judd believed if children were taught early to embrace their religion, they would be religious for life. Margaret, the freak who lives with the Indians at the Pond, initially does not attend Meeting, yet as a very young child she naturally embodies tenets of Christianity as the spokesperson for Christ in the novel. Margaret—the baby in her family--is Christ's voice and

treats people fairly from the time she is introduced to them. Her unconventionality and freakishness are attention grabbing; her leading by example is educational. As Harris in *Humbug* explains: “. . . during Barnum’s youth, this revolution broadened. Orators and politicians now placed all authority—social, moral, aesthetic, even religious—in the hearts and minds of the ordinary citizen, the much-celebrated common man” (3). Judd places his authority in a child—the common freak prophet, Margaret.

The freak child talks to Christ and questions him. This scene in the novel illustrates Margaret’s connection to Christ. She dreams that the Apostle is having a conversation with Deacon Hadlock, and Hadlock criticizes Margaret’s behavior by saying:

“When...will this young gal see herself as she is, feel her own sinfulness, her utter helplessness by nature, and throw herself on the mere mercy of God!” (125). “Hold!” said the Apostle. “She is the way of salvation. Her natural amiability is pleasing to Christ. He was amiable in his youth before God and man. No human being is sinful by nature. If she have deep love in her soul, that will remove all traces of the carnal mind. Her love, I see it now, flows out to Jesus, and his love ever flows out to her, and all the children of men, and in this union of feeling and spirit will she become perfect in holiness.” (125)

Through Margaret’s dream Judd renounces his Calvinistic belief in mankind’s innate depravity and promotes his view that children and adults are good and in need of instruction. In this scene the Apostle states that Margaret will become “perfect in holiness” because of her actions in supporting outsiders like Job Luce and the murderer. Margaret associates with hunchbacks and

murderers; the freak embraces murderers and deformed others. Through her evangelical gestures she embodies God's democratic embrace.

In encapsulating the time period from the revolution to the turn of the nineteenth century Judd's protagonist echoes back to the idea that perfection is possible through the "shining city on a hill" motif that excellence is still attainable. Judd places Margaret in Livingston, New England and the child's development is intertwined with the country's progression and mankind's second chance at paradise in the new world (268). In an 1857 review of Judd's work containing Felix O.C. Darley's sketches of the book, the author ponders New England writers since Puritan times and says of New England: "Her literature is not, like Italy's, the tomb of a majestic past, but the promise of a hopeful future.... New England, herself an imagination in process... There is a deep hopefulness in all her poetry..." (556).³¹ This hopefulness is that *this* time here in the new world the ills of the old world will not take root. Livingston is held up at the novel's end as a shining society where temperance rules, poverty is eradicated, schools flourish, libraries blossom, prisons are rendered unnecessary, a woman is the founding father, and all religious sects are welcomed in Christ-Church. Even Livingston lawyers are trusted in this near perfect society! And true to his beliefs about the problems of his time regarding religion, the staged freak Margaret embraces religious tenets and teaches adults in the community how to live together in joy and fulfillment; the common child instructs adults.

In order to showcase the protagonist in the new world as part of the wild landscape Margaret is associated with nature and her affinity with wild things is explained. Judd was a nature lover and painstakingly details the foliage where Margaret resides. For example, after Margaret loses her job as a teacher, (the townspeople are not yet ready to accept the wild Indian

³¹ *The North American Review*, 84.175 (1857): 535-59.

as a schoolteacher) she walks in the woods and allows nature to heal her. Judd lists some of the plants she encounters on her walk:

On a side of the road was the cow-path winding among sweet-fern and whortle-berry bushes, where she a little girl used to walk and even hide under their shade. The great red daddocks lay in the green pastures where they had lain year after year, crumbling away, and sending forth innumerable forms of vegetable life. On a large rock grew a thistle, the flower of which a yellow-breeched bee and a tortoise-shelled butterfly were quietly together feeding upon. Farther off, in the edge of a dark green forest twinkled the small sunflower, like a star. She walked on with a bank of beautiful flowers on either side, golden-rods, blue-vervain, mulleins, flea-bane, thoroughwort, high-mallows and others... (215-16)³²

Judd allows the reader to experience the spectacular aboriginal verdure the protagonist encounters and to be similarly healed and calmed by the beauty and curative powers of nature. On Margaret's very first visit to Meeting, she journeys from the Pond to the town, but before she arrives at the service she allows God's beauty to surround and restore her:

The sky was blue and tender; the clouds in white veils like nuns, worshipped in the sunbeams; the woods behind murmured their reverence; and the birds sang their psalms. All these sights, sounds, odors, suggestions, were not, possibly, distinguished by Margaret, in their sharp individuality, and full volume of shade, sense and character. She had not learned to criticise, she only knew how to feel. A new indefinable sensation of joy and hope was deepened within her, and a single concentration of all best influences swelled in her bosom. She took off her hat and pricked some grass-heads, and blue-bells in the

³² Judd, *Margaret* 215-216.

band, and went on. The intangible presence of God was in her soul, the inaudible voice of Jesus called her forward. (107)

This passage could have inspired Emily Dickinson's "Some keep the Sabbath going to Church": "Some keep the Sabbath going to Church;/ I keep it staying at Home,/ With a Bobolink for a Chorister,/ And an Orchard for a Dome."³³ Just as Dickinson's poem suggests, Margaret's church is the wilderness and she is inspired by all of God's natural gifts there. Her journey through the beauties in nature is more religious and meaningful than the funereal formality of her first attendance at Meeting.

Margaret is late to her first Sabbath Meeting because she first visits a murderer in jail and attempts to bring him flowers, but the jailer, Mr. Shooks, will not allow it. She talks to the murderer through the jail window and fastens some lovely flowers outside for him to see and enjoy. He tells her that she has made him human again and that he is so glad to see the beautiful flowers days before he is to be executed. He calls her a good girl and thanks her and says: "I haven't seen the sun, or heard a pleasant voice these many months. I am so changed, I don't know as I am a man. I expect to be hung in a few days, and shall love to see the flowers before I die. I remember I was a man once, and had a wife, and a child—I thank you—you are a good girl..." (107). Jailer Shooks sees things differently and intervenes: "What are you about here, you little varmint?" (108). He removes the flowers, and accuses Margaret of inciting rebellion because other prisoners want to see the flowers also and be healed by nature's curative powers. Mr. Shooks throws stones at little Margaret and accuses *her* of breaking the Sabbath. Margaret does what she feels is right in her heart—she knows the prisoner needs to be healed by nature's

³³ Emily Dickinson, "Some keep the Sabbath going to Church," *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Shorter 7th ed., Nina Baym, ed. (New York: Norton, 2008) 1203.

beauty. She helps a suffering soul, which clearly trumps getting to Meeting on time. In accusing Margaret of breaking the Sabbath Mr. Shooks never realizes the irony of *his* Sabbath behavior—throwing rocks at a little girl. He calls her a “varmint” and it is clear that he sees Margaret as someone to stone, someone who invites ridicule, someone who disrupts the Sabbath, in short, a freak.

Although at birth she symbolizes all children, she is clearly an American wild child as her oneness with native plants, trees, soil, water and animals illustrates. She is even referred to as an American Indian or “Injin” by the townspeople throughout much of the text and she is seen wearing moccasins given to her by an Indian (65). It is her comfortableness in the wilderness, as she is often appears roaming alone at the Pond that helps to characterize her as a freak. The Pond is believed to be bottomless: “It was commonly reported that the Pond had no bottom, and an indefinable awe possessed the minds of the people regarding it; but... she took manifest delight in skimming across the top of that deep dark mystery . . . she enjoyed the fearful pastime” (8). From beginning to end Margaret is comfortable in this landscape and all it encompasses, and perhaps that is why the townspeople cannot accept her as a teacher. “Yet the original coolness with which the people at large received her as teacher was fast ripening into positive dissent. Some boldly proclaimed her unfitness for the station...” (206). Margaret has always inspired the community with awe. They have never accepted the freak from the Pond and her dismissal hinges on her disciplining a child, Consider Gisborne a “larger boy” for hurting Job Luce, the fragile hunchback. They want her to get out of town and go back to the Pond where, they say, she should attempt to teach her own family some manners: “She had better learn of her Daddy how to mend her own ways aginst she comes down to patch up our’n next time” (207). The Parson even questions her support of Job Luce over the larger boy. He says of Job Luce: “...he

suffereth from that sin which we do all inherit from the Fall. The compassion which you have exhibited toward him would be counted a token of gracious affections in the regenerate mind. But continuing unregenerate, the danger is great that you will reckon it meritorious, and thus by adding to your good works, increase the probabilities of your condemnation...” (207). Once again Judd renounces the Calvinistic doctrine of innate depravity, and it is clear that the readers will side with Margaret in her kind treatment of Luce, not the close minded Parson who believes she is being nice to Luce to make herself look good. How could anyone believe Job Luce is damned just because he suffers from a physical deformity? Margaret takes to Job immediately and defends him against the bigger boy, and because of her fairmindedness she is fired. Her affinity for the freakish hunchback renders her a freak in the eyes of the community.

Each child is a microcosm of human experience,³⁴ and Judd describes *Margaret* as America’s memoir. “We conclude this chapter by remarking, that the scenes and events of this Memoir belong to what may be termed the mediaeval or transition period of New England history, that lying between the close of the war of our Revolution, and the commencement of the present century” (17). Just as the nascent country begins its journey of discovery and growth, so does the protagonist. In “The Naughty Child in Nineteenth-Century American Art” Nunes notes: “The creators of American culture often employed the metaphor of the child to define the status of the new nation, which, like a child, was energetically struggling to achieve self-definition and fulfillment” (227). *Margaret* is the community-building story of our country’s history—it is a microcosm of America’s experience,³⁵ and is linked with great hopefulness for America’s future

³⁴ Alison Lurie, *Don’t Tell the Grown-ups*. “Just as the stages of the human embryo repeat the stages of human evolution, so that at one point the embryo has gills...the social development of the individual child repeats that of the human species” (195).

³⁵ Caroline Levander, “The Science of Sentiment: The Evolution of the Bourgeois Child in Nineteenth-Century American Narrative.” *MLA* 30.1 (2000): 27-44. “In such a model the unique progress of which the United States is

greatness. We see a freakish outsider, Margaret, with a disreputable family as heroic, and American holidays like Thanksgiving supplanting in importance more European holidays, like Christmas. “Thanksgiving was an anti-Christmas festival, established as a kind of off-set to that” (61). People exchange gifts for Thanksgiving. Later, Margaret takes her Thanksgiving sled out in the snow (171).³⁶ The landscape she enjoys on her sled is dazzling:

All at once there was a glare of red light about her, the silver icicles were transformed to rubies and the snow-fields seemed to bloom with glowing sorrel flowers. It was the Northern Lights that shot up their shafts, snapped their sheets, unfurled their flaming penons, and poured their rich crimson dyes upon the white lustrous earth. She thought the Winter and the World were beautiful, her way became more bright.... (171)

Nature illuminates Margaret’s world and makes her stronger, more capable, and more American.

During the Thanksgiving festivities in the novel a brawl breaks out and Margaret’s brother Chilion, who plays the fiddle so beautifully, asks Margaret to sing in order to calm down the fighters. It is Margaret’s extraordinary singing (one of her many powers) that helps soothe and eventually stop the fight: “This twofold melody, sweet and plaintive, seemed to touch the hearts of those excited people. They stopped to hear, they heard to be won. They moved towards the music; they were hushed if not subdued, they parted in peace if not in harmony. Thus ended their Thanksgiving...” (68). As Adams in *Sideshow U.S.A.* explains: “It is an important historical lesson to recognize that freaks were not always understood as the flip side of normality; at one time, their bodies were read as figures of absolute difference who came from elsewhere and bore the portentous imprint of divine or cosmic forces” (9). Margaret has many

hypothetically capable depends upon American children’s successfully shrugging off what scientists term their ‘savage’ origins and developing into completely ‘civilized,’ bourgeois citizens” (34).

³⁶ Judd *Margaret* 171.

special powers and one of them is her singing, which helps transform people and avert a fight. Alison Luri in *Don't Tell the Grown-ups* explains how children are given extraordinary powers in literature: "Supernatural power was thus half-consciously claimed for the most powerless among us—children and the anonymous, almost invisible ordinary citizen" (43). Clearly it is easy to fit Margaret into these categories. She is an Indian freak from the Pond, she holds hands with hunchbacks, embraces murderers, her parents are drunken anarchists, she lives and plays around and on a bottomless lake, she is sought by those seeking someone with magical powers. She calms people's spirits and divines water where no adult has been able to find it.

Margaret's status as a freak permeates all three parts of the novel. *Margaret* is divided into: Part I Childhood, Part II Youth, and Part III Womanhood paralleling the three stages of mankind's development. For the purpose of this work, "Childhood" is of paramount importance and heavily influences parts two and three of the book especially since this is where Margaret is characterized as a freak and develops her powers as an "other" in the text. Yet, even as an adult Margaret refers to herself as a child. In the last section of the book she states: "I am but a child. I feel only a child's feelings. I lie on the grass, and frisk my hands and feet, a mere baby in God's Universe" (412). Margaret's mind's eye is a child's view of the world, and Judd was often described as having just such a child-like innocence and excitement.³⁷ In Arethusa Hall's biography she says that Judd said of himself: "Let me be a child..." (166). Margaret goes through troubling times with her family and community, yet she is not defined by her adversities but by her amazing relationship with everything beautiful, healing, and welcoming in the American wilderness. She helps find the elusive herbs the Widow and the Master use to heal the sick. The Master refers to Margaret as "this fair flower," (26) and is aware that she has a special

³⁷ Rev. of Life and Character of the Rev. Sylvester Judd, by Arethusa Hall *The North American Review* 80.167 (1855): 420-39.

gift of locating healing, medicinal herbs. The Master says to Obed of Margaret: “Margaret is a flower; she is my flower” (26). Margaret has located a precious and elusive herb requested by both the Master and Obed’s mother, the Widow Wright. The Master is surprised that she has found such a rare plant: “‘An Arum!’ said the Master, ‘the very thing I have been written to upon’” (26). Obed will not relinquish the plant his mother wants so badly and Margaret promises the Master to return the next day with her dog, Bull, to locate another plant for the Master. And Solomon Smith seeks out Margaret because he is aware of her freakish powers. He asks her: “Wal, now I want you should tell me if you ever found a four-leaf clover! Speak low; walls have ears” (133). Margaret tells him that she has found at least twenty, which confirms his belief in her as an exceptionally powerful herbalist.

Margaret is generous with her gifts and medicinal plants; she loves the wilderness and others who are shunned like Job Luce. The other parents treat Job Luce’s mother with curiosity: “The old people treated her kindly, but rather wondered at her boy; and what was wonder in the parents degenerated into slight, jest, and almost scorn, in the children; so that Job numbered but few friends” (113). Margaret befriends Job as soon as she meets him and holds his hand: “When the children were dismissed...[she] took Job by the hand...She looked into his face, and he turned up his mild timid eye to her as much as to say, ‘Who are you that cares for me!’” (113). This is a reason why Margaret is treated as a freak; it is because she aligns herself with outsiders. She is able to perceive their inner goodness, a powerful gift that eludes many adults in the book.

This work follows Margaret into adulthood when she marries Mr. Charles Evelyn. He teaches her the persnickety details about Christianity, although it is evident that Margaret, as a young child, has embodied Christ’s teachings: she helps the friendless, is kind to all creatures,

assists drunks, befriends fellow freaks, protects neighbors, brings flowers to imprisoned murderers, and attempts to relieve her friend Rose's melancholia. Christian virtues are in Margaret's heart before she is formally instructed; unlike townspeople who regularly attend Sunday Meeting and are mean spirited, Margaret rarely goes to Meeting, yet she does Christ's work daily. At the end of Judd's work Mr. Evelyn admits that although he knows the Bible, it is Margaret who is far superior to him, and it is she who is responsible for the transformation of Livingston—it is the religious fervor of the freak prophet that enables the metamorphosis of the community. He explains that the credit is Margaret's in a letter to Ana: "...it is she herself, and not we, who is, under God, and in Christ, the soul of all that which we now behold" (432). The journey from the freak child to transforming force is complete. Margaret describes how Livingston is like heaven to her and others living there: "Livingston seems to us, like Arranmore to the Irish, where, in clear weather, they fancy they can see Paradise" (441). The events that disturb her as a child are corrected. For one thing prisons are no longer necessary because prisoners and crime are almost nonexistent. At the end of the book Margaret explains Mons Christi: "The town is eight miles long by six broad; it contains two hundred farms, three stores, two taverns, one Church, six school-houses, three or four joiners' shops, a tannery, fulling-mill, grist-mill, blacksmith shops, &c., no distillery, no jail" (454). At the beginning of the novel the town had "five distilleries" (42). The town has changed from the time when Margaret travels into Livingston to get rum for her father, Pluck. She is verbally assaulted by the children she encounters: "'A Pond Gal.' 'An Injin, an Injin.' 'Where did ye git so much hat?' 'Did your daddy make them are clogs?' So she was saluted by one and another; but the dog...saved her from all but verbal insolence" (35). By clothing, family, and residence, she is clearly marked as a freak and an easy target for the other children's abuse. The adults in town verbally assault

Margaret as well; they are especially upset when it becomes known that the Master is teaching Margaret: “And here the Master goes up to that low, vile, dirty place, the Pond, to larn the brats” (38). The town wants power over Margaret and her family and one way to ensure supremacy over the Harts is to keep them uneducated. Margaret is a precocious learner and the Master trains her to be exceptionally smart, so in this and many other instances she eludes the community’s suffocating grasp and although she is viewed as a freak, she is a smart freak.

In a way Margaret embodies American upward mobility ideals in that one does not have to languish in the position to which one is born; one has the opportunity to advance and in many ways Margaret’s tale is a rags to riches, freak to founder success story. The beauty of the wide opened wilderness encapsulates America’s wide opportunities and the ability to climb up out of poverty through education; these are important American characteristics. Judd’s detailed descriptions of the herbs, plants, flowers, seasons and his grasp of the characteristics of the people described in this work as representative of all people in the new nation is uniquely American. In detailing how she came to understand God through nature, Margaret is the precursor of Whitman when she says: “Could I understand God in the structure of a single head of fox-tail grass, I should know more than all theosophists. Let me fall back and work the work of Nature, so shall I work the work of God, and be above all schools...Eternity is made up of moments, let me live the present moment well, and I shall live forever well” (450). Margaret tells her friend how much her husband means to her: “Mr. Evelyn revealed Christ to me, Christ revealed God to him...I vibrate to his voice when he calls me...” (437). The shunned freak becomes a paragon and a moral teacher of the community—she marries her spiritual mentor and uses her enormous fortune to improve her hometown and her friends’ lives, yet she is more than just a European Romantic child. She is described as possessing supernatural wild powers. Not

only can she find elusive herbs, locate water, and see into prisoners' hearts—she has the power to reshape her community into a new, fully functioning, successful site. She makes sure when she rises she elevates her whole town. The freak child has the power to magically transform her community and through example the whole country; she is fearless in the face of problems that appear unsolvable.

Americans were aware of criticism from foreigners regarding their children and sought to diffuse the insults: “I like [our] manners when they are not spoiled by affectation, and an attempt to imitate foreigners. I wish our people would be more independent in that respect. They ought not to despise themselves because, forsooth, every Englishman who darts through the country sees fit to ridicule their manners for differing from his own.’ Thus spake Mrs. Louisa Tuthill (1798-1879) in *I Will Be a Lady*” (175).³⁸ Mrs. Tuthill is just one example of how nineteenth century Americans were insecure about meeting the standards of English people and measuring up to great English writers like Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton and others. Judd explains: “We have a Library indeed, but how few good books!” (458).³⁹ *Margaret* is one book, which begins to answer the call to fill the nation’s library with native texts filled with peculiarly American curiosities, like *Margaret*. A review of the *Life and Character of the Rev. Sylvester Judd* states: “No one, not even Mr. Emerson, has led us through such snow-storms as are made to visit us in ‘Margaret...’” (428-9).

³⁸ Gillian Avery, *Behold the Child: American Children And Their Books 1621-1922* (London: The Bodley Head, 1994).

³⁹ Judd, *Margaret* 458.

Even before the nineteenth century Americans were viewed as barbarians and satirized as cannibals in Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal."⁴⁰ To correct this tainted image, Americans sought to educate and to elevate themselves in the eyes of the world and one way to do that was to produce great literature that defined the country. Theodore Parker, Margaret Fuller, James Russell Lowell and Nathaniel Hawthorne believed Sylvester Judd was doing just that with his uniquely American text, *Margaret*.⁴¹ At the end of the novel Margaret writes to Ana and says of the town of Mons Christi: "Our people have lost all fear of England or France..." as much as if to say we can now stand on equal footing with regard to other powers in the world because as the country writes its own literature and defines itself (instead of allowing foreigners to define it) America becomes powerful and proud.

Although nineteenth century Americans were insecure about their place in the world, in Judd's work American ingenuity and physical superiority are extolled. Here is a comparison between a British citizen and an American in *Margaret*:

John Bull and Brother Jonathan, a North Briton and a Yankee, have the same flesh and blood, the same corpuscular ingredients, the same inspiration of the Almighty. The latter differs from the former chiefly in this, breadth; his legs are longer and his feet larger, because he has higher fences and steeper hills to climb, and longer roads to travel; he is more lank because he has not time to laugh so much, since it takes him so long to go to mill, to pasture, to his neighbors; he is less succulent and oozy because he gets dry and hardened in the extensive tracts of open air he has to traverse; he is more suspicious

⁴⁰ Jonathan Swift, "A Modest Proposal" 1729: "I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled..." (1115).

⁴¹ Jones, "The Paradise of Aesthetics." "Theodore Parker dispatched the novel to his English friend James Martineau with the assertion 'that it was the most original and characteristic book that would appear here for twenty years to come...'" (449).

because in his circuits he meets with more strangers ; he is more curious for the same reason; he is more inventive and calculating for this same breadth, that he has not aids at hand, and must depend on himself; his eye is keener because he sees his objects at a greater distance; he is more religious because he has farther to go for his religion, that is to say, to meeting; men valuing what costs them much; — the whole difference is breadth, interminable forests, rivers, mountains, platitudinous farms, families reaching from the Madawaska to the Yazoo. The same cause operates to distinguish the Kentucky hunter from the Yankee, cypress swamps, alligators, catamounts, the Indians, the Mississippi. Sam Slick is an elongated and skinny John Browdie, and David Crockett is the same "critter," knobbed and gnarled. (60-61)

The landscape in Judd's novel certainly shapes Margaret. She is seen alone and fearlessly traveling the jagged landscape and paddling on the bottomless Pond. Her garb shows that she is a wild child: "She was barefoot and barearmed. She wore a brown linen gown or tunic, open in front, a crimson skirt, a blue checked apron, and on her head was a green rush hat" (7). Margaret lives in nature. Judd suggests the landscape shapes the man and the difference between Americans and Englishmen is clear—our wide open spaces define us physically, emotionally, spiritually, and morally—there is room here for everyone here. Americans, because of the country we inhabit, are unique and superior. In David Claypoole Johnston's 1836 graphic sketch "Confab between John Bull and Brother Jonathan" Johnston also emphasizes the tall, lean American conversing with the short, corpulent Briton illustrating the superior American physique.⁴² Similarly, American children are seen as different from their European counterparts

⁴² David Claypoole Johnston, "Confab between John Bull and Brother Jonathan," [S.I.: s.n., ca. 1836]: Drawn by Corkscrew. {signed on stone, D.C. Johnston} 1 print: lithograph (b & w) 21.5 x 28 cm. American Antiquarian Society. <http://catalog.mwa.org/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=152731>

as Levander and Singley state: “Seen another way, the child signifies both a space and a border between youth and maturity, between new world and old, wilderness and civilization, innocence and experience” (5).⁴³ American children had open spaces and nation building to accomplish, that is why Mother Goose rhymes were discouraged for American children at the beginning of the nineteenth century because:

‘Many worthy people think that this kind of literature is suited only to the old countries, and of course that our American children have nothing to do with such knowledge.’

William Cardell, who in *The Story of Jack Halyard* set out to write a story with ‘doctrines and sentiments intended to be American’, said as much about nursery rhymes: ‘[Mother Goose’s Melody] was a parcel of silly rhymes, made by some ignorant people in England about a hundred years ago.’⁴⁴

Presumably it behooved American children to care about practical matters not fairy tales; entrepreneurial considerations were important so that in the future they could amass wealth through their own physical and mental skills.⁴⁵ As Gillian Avery in *Behold the Child* explains: “Jacob Abbott (1803-79) was the first writer to make the American domestic scene familiar to English readers... bibliographies of his work list 180 volumes of which he was sole author...” (87). What Abbott’s books promote are “...social virtues such as obedience, forbearance, tolerance, diligence and orderliness. His aim was to produce capable, self-reliant children who questioned, discovered and thought for themselves. There was a characteristically American slant to this—knowledge brought money” (89). Writers in American like Abbott and Judd were modeling their heroes on Barnumesque qualities. As P.T. Barnum states: “At the outset of my

⁴³ Caroline Levander and Carol Singley, *The American Child*.

⁴⁴ Gillian Avery, *Behold The Child: American Children and Their Books 1621-1922* (London: The Bodley Head, 1994) 69.

⁴⁵ Caroline Levander, “The Science of Sentiment” (34).

career I saw that everything depended upon getting people to think, and talk, and become curious and excited over and about the ‘rare spectacle’” (*Struggles and Triumphs* 76). Judd’s novel presents Margaret’s as a rare spectacle possessing a unique, strong willed American spirit. The child as the country and the country as the child; they are interchangeable, and Margaret is the New World’s child. Where else in the world could a freak become the founder of a religious community, inherit enormous wealth, and use it to benefit the entire community?

Perhaps the critical movement against fairy tales had to do with Americans not wanting to seem ridiculous therefore controlling their children’s reading materials and making children’s literature more sensible. In England the Reverend Sydney Smith thought Americans were ridiculous and criticized American culture and the adolescent country as uncouth and full of criminals. Spiller says of Smith: “Of the many Englishmen who expressed themselves upon the subject of adolescent America and American literature, not one out of public life had greater influence than the Rev. Sydney Smith, Canon of St. Paul’s Cathedral and founder of the *Edinburgh Review*” (3). It is not hard to hear Sydney Smith’s admonition: “In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book,”⁴⁶ and *not* believe Sylvester Judd is answering that challenge with *Margaret* even as he situates the protagonist’s home town of Livingston: “The village of Livingston lay at the junction of the four streets” (33), and “The four streets diverging from the centre were commonly called the North, East, South, and West Streets” (34), as if this New England community is a microcosm of the “four quarters of the globe”; Margaret is not seen reading fairy tales, but studying the “Orbis Pictus,” or the world in pictures which the Master lent her to educate and elevate her (159). Judd explains that the ground Margaret treads on at the Pond although in the New World is ancient and primeval earth echoing back to days of

⁴⁶ Robert Spiller, “The Verdict of Sydney Smith” (6). Smith characterizes America as “...the native home of the needy villain...” and says: “And why should not the Americans be ridiculed if they are ridiculous?” (3).

antiquity and the Biblical flood.⁴⁷ As English writers in creating a narrative which defined their country's elite status identified the English as directly descending from great civilizations of antiquity such as Troy and Rome,⁴⁸ so we see Margaret in Judd's nation defining work suckled by a bear, similar to Romulus's and Remus's experience as legendary founders of Rome who were suckled by a she-wolf:

The mother-bear stretched herself on the ground, partly crowding Margaret from her seat, and the three cubs applying themselves to supper with all infantile zest, set an example that proved contagious, and our other cub, with curiously wrought head, took possession of an unoccupied dug, and was refreshed and soothed thereby. (148)

Margaret is a bear cub. Fiedler in *Freaks* discusses "...wild or feral children[s]...adoption by animals" (155). The freak Margaret is adopted by a bear, and is staged as the legendary founder of America which is described utilizing Peaceable Kingdom imagery. In keeping with the average citizen's elevated status in this country, she is no princess or descendant of royal blood—her biological parents, Jane and Gottfried Bruckmann, are common people who die prematurely, and her maternal grandfather, Mr. Girardeau, attempts to have Margaret murdered because he never approved of his daughter's marriage, and did not want to share his fortune with his disowned granddaughter. Reverend Sylvester Judd was well aware of current issues and no doubt read newspapers of the day. In an article in "The Age" an Augusta Maine paper, a horrific story appeared of a father murdering his grandchild, then the child's mother and father:

The Age. Augusta, (Maine) Friday Morning December 2, 1842 No. 46.
Under title:
A Tale of Horror.

⁴⁷ Judd, *Margaret* "...and an occasional fragment of trap, the results of the diluvial ocean, if any body can tell when or what that was" (7).

⁴⁸ *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* lines 1-15.

In the Runias (Iowa) Gazette, we find the most extraordinary and cruel relation of circumstances that we believe ever went in type. An old man lived alone, and had forbidden a daughter, who lived near, and her husband, or even their children, ever to approach his place, on account merely of some whimsical pique that the old wretch had taken against his child. One morning the inhuman being found his grandchild, under three years of age, climbing upon his garden rail, and he deliberately went for his rifle, and shot the boy dead. The victim fell inside of the fence. The old man reloaded and sat watching. Not long after, the mother came seeking her child, and the minute she touched her father's garden rail, as she did with a shriek, the instant she perceived her dead child, the old brute shot her in the temple, and killed her stone dead on the spot. The hoary maniac (as he is now accounted) shot the father also, when he came, and he is now in prison to answer for the three murders.

This story in *The Age*, an Augusta, Maine newspaper, is strikingly similar to what Mr. Girardeau tries to do to his daughter, Jane, and his granddaughter, Margaret, that it may be that Judd based Margaret's parentage, her grandfather specifically, on the "hoary maniac" in the newspaper article. In Judd's work Mr. Girardeau imprisons Jane's love interest, Gottfried Bruckmann, and will not think about his daughter's feelings because Mr. Bruckmann, an immigrant, is not the husband he wants for his daughter. Mr. Girardeau eventually disowns Jane, casts her out and when he finds out that both Jane and her husband are deceased, he pays Nimrod to murder the child Jane has borne, baby Margaret. Mr. Girardeau discusses his granddaughter, Margaret, with Nimrod: "That child may do me an injury, a great injury. The offspring of that viper may turn upon me with the malignity of the mother" (87). It is almost incomprehensible to have a grandfather treat his daughter and granddaughter so abominably; the newspaper article of

December 2, 1842 may have been on Judd's mind when he fashioned his novel. Judd in his healing, hopeful narrative saves the child from being killed by her grandfather—a much more humane fate than that of the child in the Augusta Maine newspaper article. That unfortunate child is murdered by his grandfather simply because he wanted to visit his grandfather's house and touched his grandfather's garden rail. Judd's belief in the innate goodness of mankind is shown in his portrayal of Margaret and her maternal grandfather. Instead of a horrific tale he spins a tale of forgiveness and reconciliation—Margaret and her grandfather make amends. Just as Whitman's focus in "Leaves of Grass" is redemptive, curative and all embracing, everything is better in Livingston after Margaret and her grandfather are reunited, and all is explained.

In keeping with Judd's redemptive message in the novel, Mr. Girardeau reconciles with his granddaughter, comes to live with Margaret and Mr. Evelyn at Mons Christi, and is around to enjoy his great grandchildren. Margaret is not murdered and is able to found Mons Christi and she willingly forgives her grandfather for his treatment of her and her parents. It is Mr. Girardeau's fortune that enables Margaret to reconstruct her town and rebuild and refurbish Mons Christi. The freak prophet's good fortune becomes the community's endowment as "Outward prosperity proved inner intelligence in Jacksonian America" (Harris 56).

In a twist similar to what happens in the myth of Oedipus, the person who is supposed to execute her, Nimrod, actually saves her and brings her home to his family who adopt her. Bruckmann, Margaret's biological father says about himself and his first love (Margaret's namesake), "We were more Sphinxes than Oedipuses" (79). So this wild child, with a parallel mythological beginning, escapes death and defines America, which can trace its ancestry back to antiquity (even as far back as the Garden of Eden) and forward to greatness.⁴⁹ The Livingston

⁴⁹ Judd, *Margaret* "The woods,--where Adam and Eve enjoyed their pastime...Assyrians learned to pray...Israelites to rebel...where Pan piped...whence Greek and Saracen, Pagan and Christian derived architecture, order, grace,

woods are just as old, inspirational, elevating, and filled with mythological curiosities as any primeval woods the world over; into these American woods in the New World, he places the freak, Margaret. As Judd explains, this town of Livingston represents America: “The town underwent and survived the various incidents and vicissitudes that belong to our national history...” (42). *Margaret* does the job of an epic in defining the young American nation.⁵⁰ In one significant scene Margaret visits a graveyard and realizes that she has no family there. “The drunken Tapleys from No. 4, moved in a body to a corner of the lot where four years before was laid their youngest child, a little daughter, marked by a simple swell of the dry sod...Margaret alone had no friends there” (202). She is like many immigrants who come to the new world and must leave their families, friends, histories, and excess cultural baggage behind. She is rootless which enhances her otherness in the novel.

The American wild child differs from her/his European counterpart because it is America, and the experience of living here on this soil that transforms and complicates the European wild child trope into the wild child prototype, Margaret. There are similarities between the two. The line from Wordsworth’s Romantic poem “My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold”: “the child is father of the Man,” still holds true in America; Margaret, as a child, *is* a more moral, mature, maternal, mentor than any member of her society. This is verified when she speaks directly to Jesus Christ and he says that all of Margaret’s behavior is correct, even though she has neglected to attend church on the Sabbath. She is morally superior to the town jailer, Mr. Shooks, who throws stones at her when she tries to bring prisoners’ flowers. She has acted morally in protecting the innocent, befriending the friendless, helping drunks—she has acted out

capitals, groins, arches; whence came enchantment and power to Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Scott, Cooper, Byrant, Titian, Ross...” (22-3). The forest in Livingston is representative of woods the world over.

⁵⁰ Levander, “The Science of Sentiment,” “According to this popular nineteenth-century scientific view, each child ‘recapitulates’ its nation’s particular evolutionary history and, in so doing, is afforded the opportunity to ‘suppress’ its nation’s ‘useless past’ (464) and to ‘purify’ its ancestors’ ‘animal nature’” (33).

of her love for all living things. She takes the world's more modern way and follows her heart not an antiquated church book. She, unlike other children, is unafraid to speak directly to Christ and to question him; she finds out that her dream is *not* just a dream, but a meaningful vision Christ has granted her and expects her to remember (128-9).

The American wild child is questioning, independent, and unafraid to challenge adults. Avery, in *Behold the Child*, discusses the difference between English and American stories for boys:

In all this, when it came to boys' stories Americans of course had an enormous advantage in the nineteenth century. There were pioneers pressing westward, there were Indians and gold-prospectors and cowboys, and fortunes to be made by even the youngest. The wilderness was at their doorstep, country boys had real axes and real guns, and could just step over the threshold to find adventure, whereas English writers had to send their characters overseas or into the past for theirs. (189)

The European feral child is far more obsequious than the American child. As Sanchez-Eppler in "Playing at Class" states: "A world where adults must ask the aid of children is a topsy-turvy place, one in which traditional models of deference, due to age or class, no longer hold."⁵¹ When Margaret first attends meeting, she is appalled by everyone's sadness and shocked that beautiful flowers are prohibited in God's house. Everything she knows about love, humanity, beauty and kindness goes out the window and she says of the experience:

I could hardly wish to go a second time. Everything was turned topsy-turvy; flowers became an abomination; for walking the streets one was liable to be knocked down;

⁵¹ Karen Sanchez-Eppler, "Playing at Class," *ELH* 67. 3 (2000): 822.

people had on gay dresses and sepulchral faces; no one smiled; the very air of the Green grew thick and suffocating; sin lurked in every spot, and I couldn't do anything but it was a sin; the most beautiful and pleasant parts of my life became a sudden wickedness; the day was cursed, and I was cursed, and all things were cursed. (227-8)

It is as if living life and enjoying the beauty God has bestowed on humans has become a burden. Margaret rejoices in beauty whereas the Sabbath keepers frown at the beauty all around them simply because they believe enjoying God's beauty on the Sabbath is sinful—no wonder Margaret is viewed as a freak when she smiles on the Sabbath and enjoys Nature's bounty.

America has been described as a wild, lawless place and in just such a place one would not be surprised to find Margaret, a child more powerful in the hierarchy than an adult. As Neil Harris explains: "...American life focused on the proximity of the frontier—an untamed natural world fraught with obstacles and dangers" (*Humbug* 71). This is a defining characteristic of America—the traditions and bigotry of the old world do not take deep root here, but are upended and in this soil the wild child Margaret blossoms; she teaches the community and establishes Christ's-Church which welcomes believers of all faiths. Margaret says: "Children that germinate with a plenty of mother earth about them, come out in the fairest hues...The tints of nature betoken vigor and heart" (441). It is not just that all faiths are welcomed, all ethnicities, and all others are welcomed into the community by the freak child. Frequently the cross in the book is intertwined with vines and roses. The cross, which is erected at Mons Christi on July Fourth, is symbiotically wedded with verdure as a reminder that Margaret comes to know Christ through nature. And Margaret herself is frequently described as a flower, lily or blade of grass in the novel—she too is part of nature.

Avery in *Behold the Child* states: “The nineteenth-century ideal for American young womanhood differed, then, in many respects from the English one. The girls we meet in American fiction are sturdier, more independent, freer in manner” (173), as is Margaret in Judd’s work. Even as a very young child when the family (who were often drunk) needs caring, Margaret helps her father through his episodes of delirium, and she walks through deep snow in order to get the much needed medicine for Chilion’s injured foot: “Hash would not go for it. Pluck and his wife could not, and Margaret must go. Bull could not go with her, and she must go alone” (167), so the youngest child in the household makes the trip for life saving medicine for Chilion, and she makes the trip in the deep snow all alone. She is described as god-like as she navigates the snow covered land which has no discernible landmarks: “She went on with a soft, yielding, yet light step, almost noiseless as if she were walking the clouds” (168). Margaret is the parent of her family, her community and she is described as freakishly “walking on clouds.”

In attempting to define the American wild child as opposed to his/her European counterpart, it is important to note that actual wild children were studied in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in Europe which fueled philosophical debates of whether nature or nurture exerted more influence on the child. Peter, the Wild Boy of Hanover, was captured wandering near Hameln, Germany in 1724, and some critics say he was a mentally handicapped individual,⁵² and some say he was never truly domesticated and therefore did not learn to articulate human language because of his wildness. Pamphlets of the day described Peter as a Wild Man suckled by a beast;⁵³ Margaret in Judd’s novel is suckled by a wild bear, which substantiates her wild child status. Marie-Angelique (Memmie) Le Blanc was captured in the

⁵² E. Burnet Tylor, “Wild Men and Beast-Children.” *Anthropological Review*. (1863) “But when Blumenbach, the naturalist, came to examine the facts of the case, he proved to demonstration that Peter was nothing but a wretched mal-formed idiot boy, who could hardly have strayed from home many days before...” (23).

⁵³ Erik David Anderson, *Feral Bodies, Feral Nature: Wild Men in America*, diss., Brown U, 2010, 80.

forest of Soigny, France in 1731 where she was subsisting on frogs, but she was soon domesticated and learned to speak French, and "...went on to converse with nobles and philosophers...."⁵⁴ And another wild boy, Victor of Aveyron, was captured in 1800 in the woods in France and studied by Jean Marc Itard and the post-revolutionary French medical community.⁵⁵ These European wild children were objectively studied and displayed to curious audiences. Mademoiselle LeBlanc was not as interesting to the French once she became a domesticated, demure French speaking woman, but she continued to fascinate the English and her life may have been grist for Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (682).⁵⁶ These European feral children are unlike the American wild child because the wild child in America is part of a larger cultural piece--the wide open, untamed, seemingly endless landscape. There is a delicate balance that must be walked: the quest to become one with the wilderness and part of it must be weighed against the risk one runs of losing oneself and becoming lost to the wilderness. To come to know God in the wilderness and found more perfect communities is the message of American wild child, Margaret; she is at home in nature, not a child who becomes lost to civilization. Margaret is seen all around the woods and the Pond in Livingston and Judd intimates that her natural assimilation with the landscape and discernment of what this town is capable of, all towns in America can aspire to. It is clear that the wilderness in America is helping to shape the new belief system of the people here.

The obsequiousness of the European child is missing in the American child. In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Victor Frankenstein is described as having an Eden-like childhood (19) and he promises his mother on her deathbed that he will dutifully follow her last wish and marry

⁵⁴ James A. Steintrager, "Humanity Gone Wild" ed. Alessa Johns rev. of *Savage Girls and Wild Boys: A History of Feral Children* by Michael Newton (682). *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38.4 (2005)681-686

⁵⁵ Anderson, *Feral Bodies* 81-2.

⁵⁶ James A. Steintrager, "Humanity Gone Wild" rev. of *Savage Girls and Wild Boys: A History of Feral Children* by Michael Newton (682). *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38.4 (2005): 681-686. See also Anderson, *Feral Bodies* 79.

his beloved adopted sister, Elizabeth Lavenza. Similarly, his youngest brother William is described as an obedient, beautiful, well-loved, near perfect child.⁵⁷ Margaret is the true New World American wild child and as such first and foremost she is independent minded and follows her own moral compass. Her moral barometer causes her to confront authorities on important issues, to disagree with her parents, siblings, the jailer, the minister and even to question Jesus Christ himself about doctrinal issues. She listens to her own heart even if it means she will be perceived as a freak.

When Margaret goes to Meeting the first time, she decides to sit upstairs and the girls snub her: “She ascended the stairs...and in a pew at the head, she saw Beulah Ann Orff, Grace Joy, Pauline Whiston, and others...they laughed and snubbed their handkerchiefs to their noses...” (109). The church-goers are appalled that Margaret does not know her catechism. She replies: “‘No,’ she replied. ‘I don’t know it; and I guess it isn’t so good as my Bird Book and Mother Goose’s Songs’” (112). Another little girl sticks up for Margaret when the adults are horrified by her lack of religious knowledge. Isabel says of Margaret: “She an’t bad, if they do call her an Injin” (113). Margaret tries to understand why everyone is so quietly reserved and sad on the Sabbath. One woman explains to Margaret that everyone is wicked. Margaret does not believe that everyone is wicked and when the woman explains that the Bible says everyone is wicked Margaret responds: “Then the Bible is not true” (115). In this way Margaret is once again seen as a freak child; she never backs away from her belief in the innate goodness of mankind. She questions adults’ beliefs and forms her own opinions.

⁵⁷ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*. Elizabeth Lavenza’s letter to Victor describing her “cousin” and Victor’s brother, William (53).

Margaret, the American wild child, is often in the woods collecting diverse native flowers, herbs, spices and curatives. She, Thoreau like, helps the Master with his work of classifying new species. Her innate goodness, knowledge of all things botanical, and her ability to be accepted as a kindred animal in this wild kingdom, enable the reader to believe that America is a second chance at paradise—the Livingston woods are Edenic and Margaret, Adam like, renames places around the Pond. She tells Mr. Evelyn: “But the names must be changed. Bacchus Hill shall be Christ's Hill, Orpheus' Pond, his Pond. He shall be supreme; Head, Pond and all, shall henceforth be called MONS CHRISTI” (263).

When a change takes place in Margaret, such as when she comes to learn about and believe in Christ, that change is reflected in renaming the landscape. She renames all places around the Pond and updates mythological names to Christian names. When she tries to put into words what these Christian revelations mean to her, she characterizes herself as a brook and explains that her babble has been transformed because of her knowledge of Christ: “I am not,” added Margaret, “so brook-like as I used to be” (229-30). Her brook voice has transformed. Margaret finds comfort, beauty and peace in nature: “...she sat mute and undisturbed, as if she were the child-queen of this pageant of Nature” (120). “...Margaret saw the deep, unalloyed beauty of the storm...The slender white-birches with silver bark and ebon boughs that grew along the path, were bent over; their arms met intertwiningly; and thus was formed a perfect arch, snow-wreathed, voluptuous, dream-like, glittering, under which she went” (168). She is not afraid to be deep in the woods and alone—she does not feel lonely because the animals, birds and all nature see her as intertwined with them. However, once she learns about Christ she sees herself as different from her squirrel, Dick, who is content to play in his cage all day—she sees the world differently and realizes that religion, true encompassing and embracing religion,

transforms her and the landscape. As she is transformed, so she transforms her community for the better.

Margaret does not judge; she fights those who would hurt the helpless. She befriends Job Luce whom the other children avoid. She understands “Whippoorwill” as Job Luce explains to Mr. Evelyn, which seems to be the language not just of birds, but of life and death.⁵⁸ “‘That is Whippoorwill,’ said Job. ‘It is the voice of nature,’ said the young man” (229). Job explains to Mr. Evelyn. Margaret saves Obed, her neighbor and the Widow Wright’s son, from being flogged by throwing her body between his and the justice administering twenty nine lashes. They try to extricate Margaret from Obed, but she has a “preternatural grasp” when she is defending an innocent.⁵⁹ Margaret does not understand the laws of the town that sentenced Obed to receive twenty nine lashes. All she knows is that he is innocent and good and she risks bodily harm to save him. Her behavior once again sets her apart. She is clearly more powerful than the adults in charge:

She heard the shrieks of Obed, she forced herself through the large ring that was formed about him...she ran forward and threw herself about the culprit. The constable tried to wrench her off, she clung with an almost preternatural grasp. He threatened to lay the lash upon her. She told him he should not whip Obed...Margaret walked through the people, who drew off on either side as she passed, her face and clothes dabbled with blood. (96)

The people part like the sea for Moses and allow her to pass through. The freak prophet has single-handedly stopped the whipping of Obed and because of her behavior other children in the

⁵⁸ Judd, *Margaret* 227.

⁵⁹ Judd, *Margaret* 96.

town cry out and see the punishment for what it is--wrong. The children's crying confounds the adults and the whipping stops. Margaret is not intimidated by the authority figures she encounters; she has no trouble standing up for what is morally correct and teaching by example. The obsequious baggage of the old world—that children must always obey adults is sloughed off in the new world--and Margaret is on equal footing with any and all authority figures.

Mr. Evelyn explains to her how the New World differs from the Old: “A good part of the Old World on its passage to the New was lost overboard. Our ancestors were very considerably cleansed by the dashing waters of the Atlantic” (266). And in the New World order the hierarchy of the Old World is replaced; here the cleansed American wild child teaches adults—the child's wildness is not savagery, but individuality. The utopian society is formed at Mons Christi at the end of the book, and Margaret explains in a letter to her friend Ana what the new society is: “We are a united but not an identical population...Striped grass, planted with other grass, becomes of one color, an uniform green...Let each spear retain its own lines, each man his own qualities...can they not all live happily and perfectly together in the same field, the same town?” (453). The individuality is cherished in Livingston as it should be in every town in America—the voice of America is as varied as each spear of grass; it is layered and echoes with many voices. This new community in the new world is no longer afraid to measure up to its European counterparts: “Our people have lost all fear of England or France...” (452), and it is obvious that America is strong, superior, here to stay, and no longer a follower, but a leader. American children were clearly different in terms of how their parents raised them.

Unlike Margaret's experience in Judd's work, in the nineteenth century's cult of domesticity, children's lives were closely managed by adults in terms of choosing and monitoring their reading material. Childhood for the cherished sentimental child was a time

period where innocence was preserved and children were protected from the cruel outside adult world as much as possible, and educating and protecting the child was of paramount importance because it was believed, in the most basic sense, that adults had important knowledge to impart to children.⁶⁰ In the beginning of the novel Margaret's father, Pluck, forbids her to go to Meeting because he does not believe in organized religion; eventually she does go because *she* wants to; as a child she is never formally taught about religion. She is exposed to her parents' and brothers' drunkenness—she is the one who takes care of and protects her family and soothes her father when he experiences hallucinations from his excessive imbibing. She is exposed to many ugly events like the townspeople making fun of her and her family and calling them Injins from the Pond, the accidental death of a classmate, losing friends through the small pox epidemic, and the execution of her beloved brother Chilion, for accidentally killing a man. These are events the cherished child is protected from in the cult of domesticity, but Margaret remains amazingly untainted by bad experiences. She is protected by the beautiful landscape around her as though nature itself is her domestic shield--her protective natural sphere.

Margaret's wildness is didactic because she is taught by nature, and her goodness innate; she does not follow the crowd, she follows her heart and is viewed as a freak because of it. The Ancient Mariner in Coleridge's poem, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," has to make the mistake of shooting the albatross before learning *his* lesson. Margaret is born with the knowledge that the Mariner must suffer to attain and impart to other potential sinners. *She* already knows:

He prayeth best, who loveth best

All things both great and small;

⁶⁰ Anne MacLeod, "Censorship and Children's Literature," "...nineteenth-century parents regulated their children's lives fully..." (29).

For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.⁶¹ (614-617)

Margaret talks to the wild animals; sings for bears; understands birds' conversations; saves the bear family from being killed; befriends misfits, and loves all creatures great and small. It is as if the voyage to the New World with its cleansing waters that her immigrant biological father undertakes, has baptized the wild child who embodies the freedoms promised by this soil. She creates an egalitarian society without having to be formerly taught. Margaret is educated, but it a fresh air education that she receives from the wild American landscape.

The wild child in antebellum fiction offers readers a glimpse of childhood before the Civil War when novels were voraciously devoured by a middle class with more leisure time.⁶² As Davidson in *Revolution and the Word* explains: "Extensive reading—and I emphasize novel reading here—served for many early Americans as the bridge from elementary to advanced literateness, a transition in mentality the importance of which cannot be overstated" (73). Davidson also explains: "...the early American novel, generically and within its unique cultural moment, was ideally positioned to evaluate American society..." (218). Americans at mid-century were reading novels to elevate and define themselves as a nation. Judd's work provides the communal story, which speaks to the country's quest for identification. We are the stories we tell and Judd is telling the American story of a wild child oftentimes seen studying books: the globe picture book, Latin, spelling, questioning, and doing what is morally correct in this American wilderness. Margaret is a poster child for educational advancement though reading. The novel at this time period was viewed as an important member of the nineteenth-century

⁶¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," *English Romantic Writers*, ed. David Perkins (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967): 404-413.

⁶² Beverly Clark, *Kiddie Lit*. "In 1843 a writer for the Ladies' Repository worries that novels 'are devoured by thousands, nay millions, of men, women, and children'; in 1847 a writer for the Christian Examiner laments the seductive power of such literature over 'the strong-hearted youth of New England'" (50).

family⁶³ for many reasons, but one reason was it enabled Americans to build community by sharing a common story. David Nord of the Track Society explains the impact of reading religious works: “In numerous essays on the nature of reading and the power of the printed word, writers for the religious publishing societies argued that reading, even cursory reading, could have powerful, direct, instantaneous almost magical effects on the reader” (245).⁶⁴ Judd’s feelings after completing *Margaret* make it clear that he hoped the reader would be magically transported to a more beautiful place literally, metaphorically, and morally by reading the work. In a review of Arethusa Hall’s *Life and Character of the Rev. Sylvester Judd* she explains how Judd felt about the book after completing it: [November 1844] “I finished my book last Friday. I have written on it till my hand is stiff, my eyes are sore, and my back aches. It has taken every leisure moment. I have not written a line to father, mother, brother, or sister, these months...” [regarding what the book is about] “Its basis is Christ; him it would restore to the Church, him it would develop in the soul, him it would enthrone in the world” (420). Judd viewed the book as an important part of his ministry. His mouthpiece for his message is a freak turned founder.

Margaret as a child is unaware of organized religion, can find water with a witchhazle stick, and is described as possessing astonishing magical gifts.⁶⁵ “It occurred to Mistress Palmer, at the Camp, that Margaret might be endowed with this rare gift, and the child was accordingly sent for” (56). Margaret can divine water: “Presently there were signs of water, then it bubbled up, then it gushed forth a clear limpid stream” (57). Margaret is brought up on this soil to be self-reliantly American. Freaks were often viewed as others, not just abnormal as opposed to

⁶³ Richard Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters*, “The novel became ‘in some sense a member of the family’ in America when and as corporal correction became the family’s special aversion” (47).

⁶⁴ David Paul Nord, “Religious Readers and Reading in Antebellum America,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 15.2 (1995): 241-72.

⁶⁵ Alison Lurie, *Don’t Tell the Grown-ups*, “Supernatural power was thus half-consciously claimed for the most powerless among us—children and the anonymous, almost invisible ordinary citizen” (43).

normal, but beings that possibly possessed supernatural powers.⁶⁶ And Margaret has the power to divine water where knowledgeable adult farmers have failed to, even though she is just a young child.

Since this work begins right after America's war for independence, Margaret's growth is intimately connected with the development of the young nation, and as America was often viewed as a second chance at paradise so *Margaret's* lesson is that people here can be saved as well. Margaret is more free here than her European counterparts and she is not morally encumbered with Old World ideas.

Antebellum America was a nation that consisted of more young people than older people and travelers to America at this time often commented on how Americans were raising their children.⁶⁷ They were allowed by their parents to question authority and to speak as equals with adults. Nunes comments: "This was, in fact, a feature of American culture that never failed to be noticed ... over the course of the century. These accounts almost unanimously describe the American child as 'wild,' 'precocious' and 'disrespectful'" (230). It is clear that the wilderness landscape has an impact on child rearing practices, as Margaret makes eye contact with Jesus and unabashedly questions him face to face, but this is not a bad thing as is hinted by the European reporters; it is part of what America is becoming in correctly sloughing off old world prejudices. Dickens in his *American Notes* makes a similar assessment of the American University:

"Whatever the defects of American universities may be, they disseminate no prejudices; rear no

⁶⁶ Adams, *Sideshow*: "It is an important historical lesson to recognize that freaks were not always understood as the flip side of normality; at one time, their bodies were read as figures of absolute difference who came from elsewhere and bore the portentous imprint of divine or cosmic forces" (9).

⁶⁷ Stewart Fraser, "Some Foreign Views of American Education." "In the 1860's ... a distinguished English Churchman, Bishop James Fraser, was traveling and inspecting both American and Canadian schools. His comparison of educational developments in North America with conditions in England led him to enthusiastic praise of the American school as a microcosm of American life" (304).

bigots; dig up the buried ashes of no old superstitions; never interpose between the people and their improvement; exclude no man because of his religious opinions; above all, in their course of study and instruction, recognise a world, and a broad one too, lying beyond the college walls” (63).⁶⁸ Margaret is a symbol of this world and the Pond an emblem of the American landscape and its healing all embracing qualities.

Margaret has a conversation with the Deacon and he tells her that we all have the same nature. The Deacon says: “There is nater in everybody only if it was not for their notions and politicals. The papists, the Negroes and the Indians have it. Like father like child,—I believe we all have the same nater” (326), and this reflects Judd’s own sermons where he envisions a more egalitarian future. Judd uses a child as his mouthpiece and hope for the nation’s future.

Margaret is categorized as a wild Indian freak for the town’s entertainment. Although they use the term pejoratively, what is more American than an American Indian? Novels and Barnum’s American Museum intersect—plays and novels were staged at Barnum’s Museum as a broadside from Barnum’s illustrates this marriage of sideshow and novels. The broadside for December 29 and 30th 1853 advertises *Hot Corn, or Life Scenes in New York, Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and “Negro Minstrelsy by The Orphan Brothers” for the “Festive Spectacles” which will take place at the Museum.⁶⁹ Another popular Barnum exhibit stages wild protagonists which elicit the question: “What is it?”⁷⁰ A similar reaction occurs while reading novels and encountering cultural others within the novel. This time period experienced the tension between educational institutions vying for audiences and showman, like P.T. Barnum, claiming expertise in order to bring in the middle class crowd under the impression that they were being educated

⁶⁸ Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation*, 2 vols. (London: Chapman & Hall, 1842). Print.

⁶⁹ Barnum’s Museum: New York: s.n., 1853. *American Broadsides and Ephemera*. American Antiquarian Society.

⁷⁰ Adams, *Sideshow*. “Figure 8. Publicity poster for P.T. Barnum’s What Is It? Advertised as a missing link between primitive humanity and the orangutan, this sensation was exhibited in New York...” (36).

about exotic cultures. Judd's novel has the protagonist go much farther—at first she is laughed at and viewed as a freak, but her journey enables readers to feel the redemptive and cleansing powers of nature and religion. Margaret is much more than a freak viewed once at a museum; she allows the reader to look at her and then she looks back and teaches the reader how to transform his/her life, community, and country. Even when she is viewed as a freak Injin or other, the people in Livingston seek Margaret out when they need other worldly or divine assistance—she is the one to go to and her special “gifts” also classify her as a cultural other.⁷¹

What is Barnumesque about Margaret is the fact that she is staged as being more at home with wild forest animals than with humans. Her status as *other* is clear because she neither fits in with, nor is accepted by, the mainstream community until the end of the novel when the mainstream moves to the Pond. She is at home and one with the wilderness; and she considers the Pond the most beautiful place in the world, and spends almost all of her time outside in nature. During the nineteenth century in museums such as Barnum's people came to view cultural oddities, and this child's otherness is on display for her community as entertainment with a didactic element.

The freak child here is wild in the sense that she is seamlessly accepted as part of the wildness that is nature; she is not perceived as a human outsider by the bear, but as another wild cub; the bear dries her tears, licks her wounds. The Peaceable Kingdom imagery is that various wild animals accept and interact with her as if she were a similar wild species: A hummingbird lands in its nest and allows Margaret to see its eggs, and the wild bees do not sting her. “This lady possessed a fine colony of bees, and Margret approached their house. . . . Not one offered her

⁷¹ Alison Lurie, *Don't Tell the Grown-Ups*. “Supernatural power was thus half-consciously claimed for the most powerless among us—children and the anonymous, almost invisible ordinary citizen” (43).

harm; she was not stung” (17). Margaret’s otherness is being an intimate part of nature; she is a wild child whose kindred wildness animals’ sense.

Oftentimes people described as “Wild Men” were exhibited with animals at Barnum’s American Museum to enhance their status and otherness, such as: “This wild man [who] poses with a monkey to suggest an evolutionary proximity to his simian ancestors” (Adams 38 Figure 9). The innate racism is clear, but with Margaret the sideshow pose of having a little girl sleep with a family of bears accentuates her exoticness, and the way the scene is set, is remarkably in keeping with sideshow exhibits of cultural oddities of the day. Margaret is a wild child and a model for Pearl in Hawthorne’s novel, because they both befriend nature in the absence of actual peer playmates.

Margaret is one with nature and although she is a social outcast, the wildness enables her to be accepted where most humans are not, as part of wild, primeval America: for Margaret the wilderness is the Pond. When people think about the natural wildness of America, the American Indian comes to mind as truly aboriginal to American soil, and in Judd’s work, Margaret, even though she is a little girl, is described as a Wild Indian.

Earlier in the novel, Margaret says she does not believe much in anything, or even read the Bible when she is a child. Margaret remembers the prisoner in the jail; it is not a scary place to her, as it would be for many of the town’s children. Margaret knows the healing power of nature and would bring prisoners nature. Margaret is always a wild child as can be seen here when she dresses herself in wilderness garb:

She got running mosses, twin-flower vines, and mountain-laurel blossoms, which she wound about her neck and waist, and pushing off in her canoe, looked into the water as a mirror. Her dark, clear hazel eyes, her fair white skin, the leaves and flowers, made a

pretty vision. She smiled and was smiled on in turn; she held out her hand, which was reciprocated by the fair spirit below; she called her own name, the rocks and woods answered; she looked around, but saw nothing. (*Margaret* 7-8)

Margaret converses with the wilderness and the wilderness answers. Leslie Fiedler in *Freaks* discusses a child's investigation of what is normal and what is freakish and the boundaries of each. Fiedler says: ". . . we cross in our imaginations a borderline which in childhood we could never be sure was there, entering a realm where precisely what qualifies us as normal on the one side identifies us as Freaks on the other" (28). Margaret is considered outside the normal community boundaries as she is referred to as a wild Indian. Another facet which identifies her as outside the normal realm in the community, is her oneness with the wilderness of the Pond.

Her adoptive mother, Brown Moll, describes her as a bat which is not the normal image that comes to mind when describing a young girl, but Moll knows Margaret is not comfortable indoors doing ordinary chores, and her adoptive father Pluck describes her as a spider. As a wild child, she belongs in nature. The townspeople treat her as if she is a freak and often expect her to put on a side show. People are jealous that Margaret has a book. "'A book, a book!' exclaimed the same young lady. 'The Injin has got a book. She will be as wise as the Parson'" (33). They tell Margaret that her drunken father's credit is no good in the store, so she must sell her book in order to purchase what she needs, and they gladly take her prize from her (33). Part of the town's plan is to keep the Injin uneducated and in her place; an educated Injin is not as much of a sideshow exhibit as a well-read one is. Similarly the actual wild girl Memmie Le Blanc became uninteresting to the French, once she was civilized. Hoeller in her article discusses how Ragged Dick in Alger's novel changes once he becomes more respectable: "If Alger's fiction depends

for its entertainment value on Dick's freakishness, what happens when Dick becomes increasingly respectable? Many readers have felt that the novel loses much of its charm when Dick rises in class, and one might surmise that Dick stops being a freak at that moment" (199). The town's view of Margaret as freak is easier to justify if Margaret remains uneducated and uncouth—a good sideshow exhibit.

Similarly, when Margaret goes to the religious revival in the woods with her brother, who only goes there to drink, people say to her: "'You may lose your soul.' 'I haven't got any' replies Margaret'" (45). The freak provides entertainment with her answers to questions about her very soul, something mainstream cherished children take very seriously, but freaks and *others* do not. For much of the novel Margaret is a social outcast, and interestingly she is eventually hired as a teacher, but the community has a hard time reconciling its image of the "wild Injin" with a respectable teacher entrusted with educating their children. She is fired from her job for disciplining an arrogant, offensive student, but it is clear that if she were not "the Injin from the Pond," she would not have been fired.

The wild child in this novel starts out as an outcast and then through her experiences becomes a model member of a new society, but Margaret never forgets what it was like to be an outsider, and remains geographically outside and thus closer to nature, at the Pond, even when she becomes an adult and has the financial means to live anywhere she pleases. Margaret does become Christianized, but she returns to Indian Head, to the place where she lived as a "Wild Indian" and those memories are still present. Her Christianity is inclusive of all religions, and people of all walks of life are accepted at the Pond as are all members of society. She has always had innate morality and her heart has been a lodestar that has steered her in the right direction her entire childhood. As an adult, she embraces more conventional religion and rights all the wrongs

she witnessed as a child. When she inherits maternal grandfather's money and he comes to live at the Pond, Margaret fixes up Mons Christi and the whole town. The jail that she found so dingy and unwelcoming when she visited murderers there, is renovated and made more spacious for the criminals; she remembers that her brother Chilion suffered there before he was executed. Now the jail is more accommodating, although unnecessary; the renovations are not just cosmetic as the society of Livingston has been changed for the better; she and Mr. Evelyn help the poor get back on their feet and become independent. After the fire, Margaret and Mr. Evelyn build schools, erect Christ Church and spend over \$100,000 embellishing their new house and helping friends and neighbors. The drinking of spirits, which was once so prevalent, has declined. They erect a huge cross at Mons Christi and make sure it is always woven with beautiful flowers and vines. They reshape society—now flowers are welcomed in church, whereas when she first went to Meeting, she was almost ejected for bringing flowers. The town is cleaner; flowers bloom everywhere. The holidays celebrated are more American holidays and more encompassing religious holidays. The former outcasts live at the Pond or Mons Christi, and at the end the Pond *is* the center of the community; it is the place everyone comes to visit, worship, and it is renowned as even Presidents of the United States know about it and visit. Margaret the wild child is a famous reformer; not only does she rename the Pond places, but she is responsible for a shift in the center or heart of the town of Livingston from where it formerly was to where it now is—Indian Head. In the novel Judd has both Adams and Jefferson visit Mons Christi. President Jefferson says: “You are the very best politicians in the land; I wish the country was full of such. You have freedom, competency, virtue. I had rather be Mrs. Evelyn than William Pitt...the nation is honored by having within its borders the town of Livingston” (452). Margaret's journey takes her from being an Injin freak to the paragon of

Livingston; and Livingston is a paradigm for the country to emulate. Mr. Evelyn says of his wife Margaret: "...she translates Nature to Man; and Man to himself" (433). Similarly, the entire novel is Margaret's translating Nature's message of healing and catholic acceptance of all to the reader. This curative narrative is mirrored in Whitman's famous poem "Leaves of Grass" ten years later. Upon first reading Whitman's revolutionary poem Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote to the author: "I am not blind to the worth of the wonderful gift of *Leaves of Grass* I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed...I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere, for such a start" (1032).⁷² I believe Judd's *Margaret* is the shaping "foreground" to which Emerson refers. Sylvester Judd's eponymous protagonist begins life as a freak yet she is redemptive and transformative; she offers readers a didactic sideshow, a world wherein an outsider can found an utopian society and ensure salvation for all.

⁷² George L. McMichael and James S. Leonard, eds. *Concise Anthology of American Literature* 7th ed. (Boston: Longman, 2011).

Chapter 2 Monstrous Freaks: Jack the Prig and the Image in *City Crimes; or Life in New York and Boston. A Volume For Everybody: Being A Mirror of Fashion, A Picture of Poverty, And A Startling Revelation of the Secret Crimes of Great Cities* by Greenhorn

First, the misshaped Dwarf seemed transformed into a huge vulture, about to tear him to pieces with its strong talons; then it became a gigantic reptile, about to discharge upon him a deluge of poisonous slime; then it changed to the Evil One, come to bear him to perdition. Finally, as the wildest paroxysms of his delirium subsided, the creature stood before him as the Image and spirit of the Dead Man, appointed to torture and to drive him mad...But with an appalling yell, it struggled from his grasp, and leaping upon his shoulders bore him to the earth with a force that stunned him; and then it fastened its teeth in his flesh and began to drink his blood. (*City Crimes* 249)

This chapter will place George Thompson's *City Crimes*, published in 1849, in its historical context, offer close readings of the text to substantiate that Jack the Prig and his brother the Image are staged as freaks in the novel, just as *others* were exhibited in P.T. Barnum's American Museum, and posit theories about the contribution this work makes, in terms of the cherished child versus the freak child, to nineteenth century American literature. Thompson uses these freak children to make a loud, clear statement about the future the American Republic has to look forward to if class warfare is not quelled and economic opportunities for advancement are not made available to all citizens not just the cherished ones. Whereas Judd's protagonist Margaret was a freak savior, in Thompson's novel *City Crimes* the freaks remain pariahs, have few if any redemptive qualities, and expose the corrupt underbelly of the cherished child of domesticity.

In order to understand Thompson's utilization of the two freak children emphasized in this study, it is important to see that Jack the Prig and his brother the Image are invisible in that they are beneath the notice of the mainstream world. They are children used in the text to highlight the differences between the lives of privilege versus the lives of poor children. Jack and the Image inhabit the Dark Vaults and are surrounded by thieves, murderers, prostitutes, and moral and environmental decay throughout their childhood. Instead of having caring parents

they have their father, the Dead Man, and his tortured wife who abuse them and train them to be miscreants. One of Thompson's goals is to make visible that which is invisible to many nineteenth century canonic readers—the freaks that lie beneath the façade of the cult of domesticity.

In *City Crimes* oxymoronic characters appear as virtuous, selfless beings, but are actually demons beneath their masks of righteousness. The Dead Man is the devious antagonist in the novel who deforms his face with acid in order not to be recognized for the crimes he has committed;⁷³ he dons a disguise to mask the ugliness of his soul in order to fool characters into believing he is honorable:

The Dead Man then proceeded to adjust a mask over his hideous face, which so completely disguised him, that not one of his most intimate acquaintances would have known him. The mask was formed of certain flexible materials, and being colored with singular truthfulness to nature, bore a most wonderful resemblance to a human face. The Dead Man, who, without it carried in his countenance the loathsome appearance of a putrefying corpse, with it was transformed into a person of comely looks. (143)

His unmasked ugliness is reflective of his soul—he is unbelievably corrupt and not above murdering children—but his disguise enables him to pass as human. Thompson sounds a wake up call by utilizing freaks knowing the reaction readers will have to the children's treatment and their hopeless future; such is Thompson's view of the future Republic if changes are not made to correct the unequal opportunities, unjust treatment, and infamous conditions of the poor.

⁷³ George Thompson, *City Crimes; or Life in New York and Boston. A Volume For Everybody: Being A Mirror of Fashion, A Picture of Poverty, And A Startling Revelation of the Secret Crimes of Great Cities* by Greenhorn Ed. David Reynolds and Kimberly R. Gladman. Amherst: U Mass Press, 2002. Print. 230.

Jack the Prig and his deformed brother the Image, are the notorious Dead Man's children. Their corpse-like father's influence reigns supreme for the entire novel, and presumably his instructions will continue to poison their adult lives as well. The freak show in the novel is most abhorrent and outrageous because the children are raised as disposable, incorrigible *villains in training*, not as cherished children. Children in literary works offer the reader an expectant future, yet there is no such hope for Jack and the Image in Thompson's *City Crimes*. The absence of children would offer a more promising future than exhibiting these children as freaks—what positive prospects can be in store for the country if these children, metaphors for the budding Republic's future,⁷⁴ are intentionally corrupted? Jack and the Image should be treasured, yet they are indoctrinated into a life of crime and groomed as puerile monsters instead of cherished children. As Fiedler in *Freaks* explains: "What monsters men have needed to believe in they have created for themselves in words and pictures when they could not discover them in nature" (27). Thompson, through Jack and the Image, forces readers to encounter these freakish monsters in their midst by foregrounding them in readers' minds so that readers can discover that the cult of domesticity does *not* include all families, and to expose the hidden, corrupt society that the cherished society ignores. The Dark Vaults community is so depraved that it will stop at nothing, not even polluting innocent children's minds and bodies for remunerative and immoral ends.

What point could the author be making by staging these children as "kid show"⁷⁵ freaks?

Could the horrific Dead Man symbolize the new Republic and its treatment of impoverished

⁷⁴ Caroline F. Levander, "The Science of Sentiment: The Evolution of the Bourgeois Child in Nineteenth-Century American Narrative." *Modern Language Studies* 30.1 (2000): 27-44. "In such a model the unique progress of which the United States is hypothetically capable depends upon American children's successfully shrugging off what scientists term their 'savage' origins and developing into completely 'civilized,' bourgeois citizens" (34).

⁷⁵ "Sideshow": "The sideshow, which was sometimes called the 'kid show,' was the smallest of the three tents that visitors could enter. Entry into the sideshow required a separate admission ticket from the rest of the circus

citizens? George Thompson is part of the working class of his time period. He published under his name and various pseudonyms including John McGinn⁷⁶ and Appollonius, but perhaps his most famous penname was Greenhorn. No one knows for sure how many novels he published in his lifetime, but the number is well over sixty (Erickson 281). He was obviously a prolific writer, also an editor of *The Broadway Belle* a risqué newspaper.⁷⁷ Thompson throws the notion of the cherished baby within the cult of domesticity out with the bathwater. There are no cherished children in this novel. Duplicity reigns, and at every turn despicable characters perpetrate heinous crimes on unsuspecting victims. The novel is a journey through the dark underground of mid-nineteenth century city life, and although the corrupt adults shock the reader, it is the hopeless depravity of the freaks--Jack and the Image--that horrifies, entertains, and simultaneously pulls at the readers' heartstrings. Thompson in staging the children as cultural outsiders of the cult of domesticity is highlighting a view of nineteenth century life offered by popular sentimental novelists versus the reality of how life was lived by the poor and working class people on the streets and in the sewers of New York and Boston. Thompson calls his work a "romance of the real," and believed it to be more fact than fiction.⁷⁸

In the nineteenth century mainstream novelists focused on the cult of domesticity to advance the idea that the child is a symbol of the country, and posit that the nation's future depended on the growth, character development, and education of the cherished child who would

experience. Men sold tickets from stands in front of the sideshow's entrance by shouting 'ballyhoo' that described the strange and marvelous sights to be seen for just a cents." The John and Mable Ringling Museum Sarasota Florida.

⁷⁶ David S. Reynolds and Kimberly R. Gladman, *Venus in Boston and Other Tales of Nineteenth-Century City Life* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2002) xx.

⁷⁷ Karen J. Renner, "Seduction, Prostitution, and the Control of Female Desire in Popular Antebellum Fiction." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 65. 2 (2010): 166-91. "Thompson was a prolific writer of sensational urban novels..." (175).

⁷⁸ Christopher Looby, "George Thompson's "Romance of the Real": Transgression and Taboo in American Sensation Fiction *American Literature* 65.4 (1993): 652.

then ensure the Republic's advancement and success.⁷⁹ Instead of being educated and elevated however, Thompson's freak children are purposely dis-educated by the cult of criminality and duplicity. When one imagines the cherished child of domesticity tutored and loved by a caring family reading together around a well-lit hearth and then juxtaposes that experience with the dark, sewer-like dwelling of Jack and the Image, one wonders how anyone (even in fiction) could allow children to be treated so abominably. Thompson's point about the cult of domesticity is that it is a lie. It is codswallop.

Barnum certainly influenced the way Thompson stages these children as freaks. George Thompson once won a cash prize for best original play performed at Barnum Museum: "...and a play (in installments) called *The Demon of Death: or, The Bandit's Oath!!!* Written by 'Green Horn,' the *Demon* was said to have won a \$500 prize offered by P.T. Barnum for the best original play adapted for performance at his American Museum" (xv).⁸⁰ Not only did Thompson mirror Barnum's techniques in staging his freaks Jack and the Image, one of his plays was performed at the famous American Museum; Thompson knew his way around Barnum's famous museum and was able to incorporate similar marketing techniques to attract readers in to his novels.⁸¹ And just as at Barnum's American Museum patrons would be entertained and educated, such is the case with Thompson's novels; there is a didactic element which goes hand in hand with kid show entertainment.

⁷⁹ Caroline F. Levander, "Let Her White Progeny Offset Her Dark One": The Child and the Racial Politics of Nation Making *American Literature* 76. 2 (2004): 221-246. "Indeed, in a range of political narratives, the nation's founders use the image of a child to advocate establishing an autonomous political entity that is based upon, and fully realizes, the Anglo-Saxon love of freedom inhering in its inhabitants" (226).

⁸⁰ David S. Reynolds and Kimberly R. Gladman's introduction *Venus in Boston and Other Tales of Nineteenth-Century City Life*, by George Thompson (Amherst: U Massachusetts P, 2002) xv.

⁸¹ David S. Reynolds and Kimberly R. Gladman's introduction *Venus in Boston and Other Tales of Nineteenth-Century City Life*, George Thompson's (Amherst: U Massachusetts P, 2002). "Indeed, Thompson was just as intent as Barnum on displaying the repulsive and the bizarre... "The display of the woman with a 'Death's Face' is just an open instance of the Barnumesque exhibitionism that governs Thompson's fiction" (xxxii-xxxiii).

Thompson's novel was widely available to a reading audience⁸² of working class people⁸³ and aside from his desire to profit by publishing his works—which is something he readily admits—he knows his message will be received by the working class who are maltreated by the rich. In *City Crimes* he appeals to the working class and elevates the manual laborer when he states:

Oh, laborer! Thou art uncouth to look upon: thy face is unshaven, thy shirt dirty, and lo!
Thy overalls smell of paint and grease; thy speech is ungrammatical, and thy manners unpolished—but give us the grasp of thy honest hand, and the warm feelings of thy generous heart, fifty, yes a million times sooner than the mean heart and niggard hand of the selfish cur that calls itself thy master! (183)

Most often the darkest villains in his novels are the disreputable rich who torment the honorable working class heroes. In *City Crimes* the wealthy are exposed and the worst demon, the Dead Man, is shown to be a byproduct of unequal economic opportunities. In short, the monstrous Dead Man is spawned by the colossally rich ruling-class. Thompson did not approve of genteel literature meant to pacify workingmen's passions.⁸⁴ He viewed himself as a man working with his hands,⁸⁵ paid by the word, and believed his writing would aid workingmen by apprizing them of the duplicitous elite class who espoused one set of rules for the working class and a very different set of standards for themselves. Thompson could have been writing for P.T. Barnum

⁸² Mary P. Ryan, *Empire of the Mother: American Writing About Domesticity 1830-1860*. (New York: Harrington Press, 1985) 14. "Literacy had, in fact, grown rapidly between the American Revolution and 1840, when ninety percent of the native-born, male and female, could read and write" (14).

⁸³ David M. Stewart, "Consuming George Thompson," *American Literature* 80.2 (2008): 233-63. "The main audience for cheap, sensationalist reading was the large numbers of workingmen who filled antebellum cities" (235).

⁸⁴ David M. Stewart, "Consuming George Thompson," *American Literature* 80.2 (2008): 233-63. "Thompson opposed the self-objectification taught by approved reading for men—" (243).

⁸⁵ Paul Erickson, "New Books, New Men: City Mysteries Fiction, Authorship, and the Literary Market." "Early American Studies 1.1 (2003): 273-312. "But, in large part because they began in artisanal positions in the print industry, these writers did see their form of popular authorship as having significant parallels to manual and industrial labor" (300).

who as Harris explains, “. . . arrived in the city with little education, less money, and high ambitions” (*Humbug* 19). Ryan in *Empire of the Mother* discusses the genesis of the American Industrial Revolution: “The wage worker, the factory, and the big city grew up over the three decades before the Civil War and clearly signaled an economic and social transformation, variously called modernization, industrialization, or early industrial capitalism” (13). Ryan explains that the social changes occurring were reflected in the literature of the time period and that fiction offers an important repository of what life was really like in antebellum America: “As ideology, popular literature is an object of historical inquiry as important, and in some ways more complete and resonant, than raw individual experience” (11). Thompson believed his works were doing important things, reporting and entertaining the working class audience. Stewart in “Consuming George Thompson” states: “Reading was a means to success in the new economy” (244), and if the working class was going to have a fair chance to succeed, it needed writers like Thompson to educate readers about pitfalls in city life. Lara Cohen in “Democratic Representations” cites an 1842 publication to support the strong connection between literature and egalitarianism: “This time the *Democratic Review* simply declared: ‘The spirit of Literature and the spirit of Democracy are one’” (645). Thompson’s works are entertaining in more ways than one: the pornography titillates, and the class awareness promotes camaraderie while providing important information about the stratification of society. And as Stewart says: “Workingmen wanted reading and got it. It was cheap, abundant, and of good quality” (251).⁸⁶ Workingmen were reading to become educated, street savvy, and to raise their living conditions. In reading about the plight of poor children, workingmen could be moved by the deplorable, hopeless state of the children; and it is a small step from being moved regarding an important

⁸⁶ David M. Stewart, “Consuming George Thompson,” *American Literature* 80.2 (2008): 233-63.

issue to acting and enacting changes to address issues of inequality.

If educating workingmen about the duplicity of the elite class in order to protect the laborers from being taken advantage of in the work place is one purpose of this novel, how much more important is protecting children from the elite class's exploitation? It is powerful to display freak children to illustrate their emotional and moral debasement due to their indigence. However, Jack and the Image are not just suffering financially, they lack parents to advocate for their education and elevation; and they lack a society that "sees," protects and cherishes them. In antebellum America the child and childhood itself was beginning to be treasured; children were thought of as gifts and their entry into the working world was postponed as long as possible to enable them to experience the joy of home, family, and to bask in the hearth's protection from the cruel world of adults: Joseph Kett in "Adolescence and Youth in Nineteenth America" explains: "As the image of home became more sentimentalized in the nineteenth century, one's entry into the world of affairs appeared more threatening. Or, we can argue, the more menacing the world became, the greater the disposition to drench home and family in sentiment" (295). The fact that Jack and the Image are working for their deranged parents in a crime factory and indoctrinated into lives of crime as toddlers, instead of being sheltered from evil by their parents, would resonate with antebellum readers—these children have no protection at home or in their insidious "homey" workplace. One main reason for their abuse is economic—they are used in their parents' schemes to swindle victims, and the Dead Man brags that his son is a great part of the working class. He says of Jack: "Why man, he can pick a pocket in as workmanlike a manner as either of us. He will make a glorious thief, and will shed honor on his father's name" (232). Jack the Prig and the Image suffer from what Halttunen describes as the "pornography of pain" not in terms of sexual abuse, but in terms of the other antebellum definition of

pornography—that they live with and interact with prostitutes (and other debased criminals)—this is *their* neglectful hearth.

Reading *City Crimes* offers readers titillating peeks and forbidden glimpses of illicit sexual encounters, brutal tortures, murders, and other heinous crimes. For example one of the men referred to as the Doctor, presumes to question the Dead Man's authority and he is challenged to a deadly game: "You shall fight me, hand to hand—here to-night, at once; the Knights shall form a ring, and we will arm ourselves with Bowie knives; *cut and slash* shall be the order of the combat; no quarters shall be shown; and he who cuts out his adversary's heart, and presents it to the band on the point of his knife, shall be Captain of the Round Table" (250). These are the kind of homey games the children witness. Even the treatment of members within the band of criminals is brutal, but the freak children in their cult of demons and their mistreatment offer the reader a mirror reflection of poor children's lives that working class readers would recognize. And the antebellum novel is a place where entertainment and education intersect. Bardes and Gossett in *Declarations of Independence* explain that the novel did important cultural work. In the nineteenth century the novel was a source of people's education and elevation. They record that: "...the *North American Review* noted in 1844 that 'the novel has become an essay on morals, on political economy, and on the condition of women, on the vices and defects of social life'" (5-6), and Thompson is highlighting the "defects of social life" with *City Crimes*. His depicts children staged as freakish aberrations, but who are ironically recognizable symbols of poverty stricken city children of the time period—his romance of the real may be a cry for help, or a scream to give Jack and the Image (and neglected children of the time period) a voice since they are silenced by their parents, powerless and invisible within society. Millner in "The Senses of Reading Badly" discusses how many of the

papers deemed obscene in the 1850s such as *Venus' Miscellany*, the *Phoenix*, and the New York *Miscellany*, and also the *Broadway Belle* where Thompson was editor for some time, did do cultural work and offered readers news on topical issues such as the rich versus the poor.⁸⁷

Millner explains that after many of these newspapers were labeled obscene and burned along with many flash pamphlets in the 1857 bonfire⁸⁸ some writers switched to yellow-jacketed novelettes consisting of about 100 pages wherein they accomplished a similar task of reporting on the disreputable escapades of the elite class. Thompson is situated within this class of editors and writers. His topics were timely issues that discussed matters of the day and the readers would recognize thinly veiled (or not so thinly veiled) references to actual occurrences.

Thompson was a writer writing about the real.

One example of the short, yellow-jacketed publication where Thompson discusses actual antebellum events occurs in his novel: *Catharine and Clara, or The Double Suicide: A True Tale of Disappointed Love* published in 1854. This short novel discusses the suicide of two young women who worked in the mill and drowned themselves one evening. They had threatened to kill themselves, but were not taken seriously by their roommates. The two young women got their affairs in order, wrote last letters, walked to the mill holding hands and jumped off the bridge into the canal; they both died. Their deaths are due to their economic standing; two more promising youths are destroyed.

Clara C. Cochran was nineteen years old and Catharine B. Cotton was twenty-two.

George Thompson writes his novel based on the women's suicide. Various newspapers at the

⁸⁷ Michael Millner, "The Senses of Reading Badly: The Example of Antebellum 'Obscene Reading,'" *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 57.3 (2012): 274-313. "I emphasize that the papers do transmit important information..." (286).

⁸⁸ Michael Millner, "The Senses of Reading Badly: The Example of Antebellum 'Obscene Reading,'" *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 57.3 (2012): 274-313.

time carried the stories and printed the women's last letters; their suicide caused a media sensation. It is thought that both women were jilted by their lovers and therefore checked out of the world because of their intense unhappiness. Catherine Cotton was used by her lover, Cyrus, who promised to marry her even though she had no money. She asks him: "*But are you content to become the husband of a poor factory girl?*" (6). He replies that of course he is, and she makes all the necessary arrangements for their marriage, but he dumps her at the last minute to pursue a rich heiress. Cyrus had done this before and had driven one of his former lovers mad. She is the wild woman in the text driven crazy by Cyrus: "Her raiment was tattered, and carelessly put on; no shoes protected her feet; and the only shelter for her head was a fantastic wreath, formed of flowers and leaves" (9). She lives in a cave and dies a horrific death, presumably of a broken heart. Thompson in a curative manner has Cyrus's current love interest find the wild woman and bring her home, but she is too sick and abused to survive. So, in the end Cyrus's plan to marry a wealthy woman is foiled because the heiress knows about Cyrus's past behavior towards women. Catharine Cotton's heart was also irreparably broken by Cyrus, and she too meets a deadly end. Clara Cochran's story is similar, but she loved a childhood friend who wrote to her frequently and when they attend the same school and he realizes she is getting too close to him, he cuts off their relationship. She may have believed there was some reciprocated love interest, when in fact there was nothing inappropriate about the man's friendship. In any event, she kills herself with Catharine and they both leave letters to their families and to the men who broke their hearts. This story was reported in the Manchester (N. H.) *Daily Mirror* on August 15, 1853.⁸⁹ It is interesting that in retelling and augmenting the actual events George Thompson makes a point about the different economic classes involved.

⁸⁹ *National Aegis*. "Heart Rending Suicide of Two Young Ladies." August 24, 1853. American Antiquarian Society. Worcester, MA.

He says he is impartial towards Cyrus, but keeps discussing what an accomplished lady Catherine Cotton was, even though she was a “mill operative.” He talks about the poetry she wrote, how she liked to read and write and other events she attended. Thompson is clearly painting a picture for the reader of the evil “upper class” rich rogue who took advantage of a gullible working class factory girl and caused her death. In the novel the narrator explains: “This letter will show that Miss Cochran possessed literary abilities of a very respectable order. She was frequently in the habit of beguiling her leisure hours by writing compositions, both in poetry and prose. Some of these productions she caused to be published in different magazines and newspapers” (38). Thompson focuses on the fact that the factory girl is not only on par with the educated ladies of the time, but actually morally superior to rich women. In his novel he has entries from Catherine Cotton’s diary where she discuss a party she attended and the events that took place: “Last evening I attended a very agreeable party, at which many of the factory-girls were present. A beautiful time we had of it, music, dancing, and other innocent enjoyments-- How superior are such simple, harmless amusements, to the pursuits of the wicked! Innocent pleasures leave no sting behind them, while guilty joys result in sorrow and remorse” (42). Thompson drives his point home when he has Cyrus compliment Catherine on the way she looks at the party to illustrate why Thompson believes Catherine to be superior to rich women who live off their spouses. Catherine says: “Indeed, I am vain enough to believe that I did look remarkably well; for I wore a new silk dress, bought by the proceeds of my own industry” (42). She looks good in the clothes she worked for and paid for with her own money. Her hard work earned her the right to look good. Thompson takes a real event that was reported in the newspapers and like any developmental writer, puts his own spin on the events, which illustrate his belief in the superiority of the working class. This yellow-jacketed publication is based on an

actual occurrence, so it is not hard to believe that his other publications allude to actual events of the day. He details the collapse of the bourgeois society; the so called lower economic classes through work, education and drive are elevating themselves to be on par and even superior to the bourgeois class. In various city mystery novels "...the world appeared to be falling apart at the seams, but the writer was now more free than ever to put aside restrictive conventions and to revel in the sights, sounds, and smells of the world around him."⁹⁰ Thompson's freedom as a writer allows him to advocate for the working class versus the bourgeois class in his works. The two young women die because of their lower economic status; Jack and the Image are enslaved because of their economic status.

In 1853 the evils of slums and the degeneration of city life is discussed in *The United States Review* and in 1860 the *New York Times* cited New York as "the unhealthiest city in the world."⁹¹ Thompson is writing about New York slums, specifically the infamous Five Points, and readers would recognize that his writing was not hyperbole. As M.J. Heale explains: "By mid-century New York could almost claim to be the death capital of the world, for in 1855 its death-rate reached one in 27-33 of the population, higher than that of any other American or European city for which statistics were available...." (20). So when the bodies are described as floating through the Dark Vaults and putrefying in *City Crimes*, Thompson's novel is focusing on the realities of the day—a romance of the real.

Monstrous Freaks in *City Crimes*:

In terms of the romance of the real or the realistic adventure, one of the nineteenth century's most recognizable tropes was "the oxymoronic oppressor: the outwardly respectable

⁹⁰ Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance* 317

⁹¹ Heale, M.J. "Harbingers of Progressivism: Responses to the Urban Crisis in New York, c. 1845-1860," *Journal of American Studies* 10.1 (1976): 17-36.

but inwardly corrupt social leader” (xlvii).⁹² The child freaks in *City Crimes*, Jack the Prig and the Image also function as oxymoronic characters. Jack has the appearance of an adorable, innocent little boy and then he opens his mouth and we hear he has been poisoned by his father and is in actuality an experienced, hardened criminal. The Image, who never sees the light of day and very infrequently sees other people unless they are imprisoned in the dungeons by his father, looks like a freakish monster—yet he is clearly a handicapped, deformed boy who has been disposed of in the Dark Vaults (like other refuse) by his parents. He moans and longs for human companionship. Frank Sydney tries to converse with the Image, but the boy is incapable of answering the protagonist and is objectified as an “it” instead of a he: “It answered not, but again set up its low and melancholy wail. Then with extraordinary agility, it sprang from its retreat, and bounding towards the dungeon, entered, and crouched down in one corner, making the cellar resound with its awful shrieks” (203). The reader is reminded of P.T. Barnum’s “What is it?” exhibit where viewers were challenged to categorize the “thing” on display (Bogdan 141). It is hard for Frank Sydney to know what the Image is. It is obvious that the Image’s disabilities require assistance and understanding from both his parents, yet he is discarded in the sewers and used as a tool to frighten and mentally torture other victims of the Dead Man. Both innocent boys are entrusted to their parents to be brought up to be contributing members of their community and the country as a whole. Instead, they are kept away from educational enlightenment, which could have elevated them and allowed them to partake in normal society. The boys are taught a perversion of religion and morality meant to secure their damnation as eternal freaks instead of their salvation. George Thompson debunks the myth that all or even most children in the nineteenth century were cherished, an image and experience most likely

⁹² David S. Reynolds and Kimberly R. Gladman in the introduction to George Thompson’s *Venus in Boston and Other Tales of Nineteenth-Century City Life*. (Amherst: U Massachusetts P, 2002) xlvii.

absent in the lower classes. The cherished children were select middle class children; the poor could not afford to cherish their children--they were trying to make ends meet and put food on the table. Bernstein in *Racial Innocence* explains the depiction of the child mid-nineteenth century: "Books about angelic white children shared shelf space with books about bad boys and hoydens, and middle-class children became 'priceless,' in Viviana Zelizer's term, while working-class and poor children sweated in factories and fields" (33). Jack the Prig and the Image are the underside of the cherished child; they are what lies beneath the myth. The Image, as his name suggests, mirror-like reflects back to society Thompson's topsy-turvy views of it.

Jack and the Image are purposely debased by their parents most notably their father--the Dead Man. The venue of the freak show is kept in mind as the reader descends to the subterranean vaults where the viewers encounter frightening others—like the Image. Most parents are proud of their children's accomplishments and the Dead Man is no exception, which is made clear as he questions Jack about the young boy's knowledge of the world. This conversation takes place in front of the Dead Man's associates who are the oxymoronic perversion of King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table-- *The Jolly Knights of the Round Table*:

'Pals, you know the blessed Bible tells us to 'train up a child in the way he should go;' very good—now you will see how well I have obeyed the command with this little kid. Attend your catechism, my son. What is your name?
 'Jack the Prig,' answered the boy without hesitation
 'Who gave you that name?'
 'The Jolly Knights of the Round Table.'
 'Who made you?' asked the father.
 'His Majesty, old Beelzebub!' said the child.
 'For what purpose did he make you?'
 'To be a bold thief all my life, and die like a man upon the gallows!'
 Immense applause followed this answer.
 'What is the whole duty of man?'
 'To drink, lie, rob, and murder when necessary.'
 'What do you think of the Bible?'
 'It's all a cursed humbug!'
 'What do you think of me—now speak up like a man!'

‘You’re the d-----dest scoundrel that ever went unhung,’ replied the boy, looking up in his father’s face and smiling.’ (135)

After this recitation the proud father shares a glass of brandy with his five-year old son. He is delighted with Jack’s descent into pandemonium; the Dead Man takes great pleasure in his ability to school his son to be a first rate criminal. He makes a prediction that his son will become “...a great thief” (135). Later in the novel the Dead Man has a conversation with Ragged Pete about the bright future he envisions for Jack: “The day when he commits murder will be the happiest day of my life” (235). The polluted aspirations the Dead Man has for his son appall, yet would resonate with Thompson’s readers. What chance do the working class have to ensure bright futures for themselves and their children when the rich are in charge and controlling the wealth of the nation? Reynolds and Gladman state: “Between 1825 and 1860, the richest 10 percent of free wealth holders owned a staggering 73 percent of the nation’s assets; by the Civil War, the poorest half of Americans owned just 1 percent of all assets” (xliv-xlv). This stunning statistic would be manifestly clear to workers reading the romance of the real—the novel, and the disreputable rich man, a familiar trope, is the omnipresent villain not just in workers’ novels, but in their lives as well. Perhaps Thompson’s most used pseudonym, Greenhorn, is what readers are before he educates them with his writings. He utilizes protagonists as ingénues in his various novels and novellas and enables readers of such works to tutor themselves about the corruption in society so that they are *not* greenhorns in mid nineteenth century American society; once they finish reading the readers are wise to the wily ways of the world. As Neil Harris explains, “. . . New York City had been popularly known as Gotham, the legendary town of fools, and the name appeared to have some basis in fact” (*Humbug* 68). Overpowering schemes, trickery, and hoaxes awaited greenhorns in the city, and Thompson does his part to instruct his readers so that they are not fooled.

The corrupted child and the cherished child are the topsy-turvy characters of their time. Each is a side of the other. Freaks are described as doubles and Jack the Prig and the Image are *others* in terms of the cult of domesticity and respectable society. As Adams in *Sideshow* explains: “The unpleasant stirrings of mutual recognition presumed to accompany the exchange of gazes between performer and spectator has given rise to numerous interpretations of freaks as metaphors or doubles for what Leslie Fielder calls the ‘secret self’” (8). Jack and the Image are the secret side of the cherished child of nineteenth century society. The disparity of wealth during the middle of the nineteenth century and the different lifestyles experienced by the “have and have-nots” is highlighted by Thompson to show that not only the Dead Man and his wife, but society and corrupt officials as well are responsible for the state of Jack and the Image. The Dead Man and his wife as “victims” and poor people as fatalities of societal corruption enable the reader to limn the freak show exhibit where future citizens of America, emblemized by Jack and the Image, are forever disenfranchised. Adams in *Sideshow* discusses freaks as an outward representation of society:

As the sideshow’s curiosities are taken up by art and literature, the freak is assimilated as a double, Other, or effect of subjectivity. This movement can result in self-absorption of the kind we see in *Freaks*, [the movie] or a greater understanding of the way that individual disaffection may be attributed to an oppressive social context. Recognizing freaks as a problem generated by one’s own culture, rather than imported from elsewhere, makes it possible to approach that problem from within. (158)

Freaks tell us about ourselves and society. As Stewart explains: “Often referred to as a ‘freak of nature,’ the freak, it must be emphasized, is a freak of culture” (*On Longing* 109). The “oppressive social context” here is economic and social. The freak children presented in *City*

Crimes do not have to be imported from exotic locales—there are plenty of poverty stricken children who fit the description of being so hungry that they feast on waste and carcasses which float through the sewers of cities like New York. In chapter six the boy, Clinton Romaine, guides Frank Sydney through scenes of horror: “...that these vaults communicate with the common street sewers of the city; well, those animals get into the sewers, to devour the vegetable matter, filth and offal that accumulate there; and, being unable to get out, they eventually find their way to these vaults. Here they are killed and eaten by the starving wretches. And would you believe it?—these people derive almost all their food from these sewers” (133). In the introduction to the text Reynolds and Gladman explain that the hogs were useful at trash removal: “Garbage, in an age before regulated trash collection, was freely tossed onto the streets, where scavenging pigs were the only reliable means of public waste removal” (1). Thompson’s awful imagery is a mirror accurately revealing antebellum society.

In *City Crimes* whether or not a character was forced to remain in jail if arrested depended on the socioeconomic status of the character and whom he could bribe. Reverend Ballam Flanders, the reverend rake in the novel, is on an alcoholic spree and winds up in jail. Once the judge recognizes him, he is immediately released on his own recognizance. It is his status as a respected minister with wealthy and powerful friends that allows him to be released from jail whereas a poor person is forced to stay in jail indefinitely. When Frank Sydney disguises himself as a lowly tramp in order to permeate and blend into the poor society to help in any way he can, he too sees the disparity of how people are treated based on their economic status. When Sydney has been arrested and is awaiting the judge’s sentence he witnesses first hand how the rich and poor are treated. Dionysus Wheezlecroft an innocent, defenseless, sick, drunk, is brought before the captain. The captain asks the under-official for the man’s history.

The under-official gives the man's name and explains that he is sick and has been swindled and brought low by his political party. Once the captain realizes that the man is from the *other* political party he sentences him to a long jail stay which will kill the drunk because he is so consumptive: "'Lock him up,' cried the Captain—'he will be sent over for six months in the morning.' And so he was—not for any crime, but because he did not belong to *our party*" (196). People are sentenced for no particular crime, but because the person sentencing them has the power to manipulate the law and help his friends and punish his enemies (real and imagined). Once Frank comes before the captain he is treated exceptionally well because although he is disguised as a poor man, he *is* a rich man. Frank is immediately released and comes away from the experience feeling sick:

Our hero left the hall of judgment, thoroughly disgusted with the injustice and partiality of this petty minion of the law; for he well knew that had he himself been in reality nothing more than a poor sailor, as his garb indicated, the three words, 'lock him up,' would have decided his fate for that night; and that upon the following morning the three words, 'send him over,' would have decided his fate for the ensuing six months. (196)

So much for the land of the free and all men being treated equitably; Thompson's depiction of the romance of the real would resonate with readers' experiences of inequitable treatment based on economic status.

Michael Millner in "The Senses of Reading Badly," discusses the newspapers of the day and the topics they loved to include within their pages: "A favorite topic was the duplicity of the elite ("of certain classes of society"), who were often discovered in compromising positions" (282).⁹³ The hero of *City Crimes*, Frank Sydney, realizes the unfair treatment poor people receive

⁹³Michael Millner, "The Senses of Reading Badly: The Example of Antebellum "Obscene Reading,"" *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 57.3 (2012): 274-313.

at every turn in society—their alcohol is poisoned with thinning agents and they drink ‘blue ruin,’”⁹⁴ the judges and police officers are paid off to look the other way, to release a guilty person, imprison an innocent one, and sometimes to help a wealthy criminal commit a crime. Thompson illuminates the corrupt society that coexists with the image of the cult of domesticity. It is no wonder the Dead Man teaches Jack the Prig to worship Beelzebub instead of God—the cries of the poor people for fairness and justice have not been heard by God, and their world appears to be given to Satan. In Tylor’s 1863 article, “Wild Men and Beast-Children” he contemplates how one might find and actually document the lowest level under which a human society can exist: “It is an object of some importance to anthropologists to know where the lowest limit of human existence lies; but, unfortunately, this limit is difficult, if not impossible, to find” (21). Thompson has found it and he did not have to look far. This lowest possible limit of human existence is found in the Dark Vaults of New York City, and Thompson writes familiarly about the place in *City Crimes*. Other writers also discussed the notorious slums of New York, especially Five Points. Anbinder explains:

Writers of every background visited Five Points to witness the depravity for themselves. Journalist and reformer Lydia Maria Child reported that "there you will see nearly every form of human misery, every sign of human degradation." Frontiersman Davy Crockett said of the Five Points inhabitants: "I would rather risque myself in an Indian fight than venture among these creatures after night." Scandinavian author Fredrika Bremer asserted that "lower than to the Five Points it is not possible for human nature to sink."⁹⁵

It is truly Barnumesque to have these writers and frontiersmen visit and view the depravity of Five Points as if they were viewing exotic, savage others at the American Museum. They come

⁹⁴ George Thompson, *City Crimes* “Half pints of ‘blue ruin’ were dispensed to the thirsty throng...” (130).

⁹⁵ Tyler Anbinder, "We Will Dirk Every Mother's Son Of You": Five Points And The Irish Conquest Of New York Politics." *Eire-Ireland* 36.1/2 (2001): 29-46. *America: History & Life*. Web. 6 June 2012.

to witness to the freak show that is reality for impoverished New Yorkers. As Randall Stewart says: “. . . it's fun to gawk at freaks. . .” (329).⁹⁶

The cherished child and the freak child in the topsy-turvy class stratification of antebellum America is made clear when one looks at publications of Sabbath School Society. For example in 1839 a small book entitled “Cruel Jack” dictates the cherished child’s expected behavior. The quotes show that the cherished child is loved whereas the cruel, misbehaving child is despised: “I would not be a *cruel* boy. God does not love a cruel boy. No one loves him” (4-5). The book also discusses a boy abusing a fly and expounds on the inappropriate behavior of such a boy in the following verse:

“’Twas God that made that little fly,
And if you pinch it, it will die:
My teacher kind has often said,
You must not hurt what God has made.
For God is very kind and good,
And gives to little flies their food,
And loves each gentile little child,
Who is kind hearted, good and mild.” (6)

Jack and the Image must attract less attention than a fly in antebellum America because their abysmal existence and maltreatment does not command as much concern as the fly’s abuse does in the above poem. “And loves each gentile little child”; but what if the child or children are brought up and taught to be cruel and are themselves treated heartlessly? No one would call Jack and the Image gentle little children; does that mean they are hated? To hate takes emotion and a commitment of time and attention—society is indifferent to the boys, which is a far crueller fate.

Thompson has Jack the Prig attribute his creation to Beelzebub, and the second coming appears to be at hand as the Dead Man is allowed to rule because of the complicit police force

⁹⁶ Randall Stewart, “Hawthorne’s Contributions to The Salem Advertiser,” *American Literature* 5.4 (1934): 327-341.

and the corrupt wealthy ruling class. The Dead Man has said the happiest day of his life will be when his son Jack commits his first murder; however, the Sabbath School Society is concerned about children abusing a fly. George Thompson is showing the world as a hopeless place unless people awaken and see the freak show not as a venue for *others* but as a room filled with mirrors reflecting the evils of a two tiered society back to the reader as Jack's brother's name "the Image" aptly suggests.

Freaks are not redemptive: society is not curative.

Just twelve years after *City Crimes* is published the country is in the midst of a divisive civil war and class distinctions are still an issue, but in a dozen years much progress has been made on the battlefield if not in society. In Glatthaar's article "Everyman's War: A Rich and Poor Man's Fight in Lee's Army," he cites research which shows that although there were avenues whereby rich Confederate soldiers could hire a substitute soldier to take their place, this rarely happened. The rich served in disproportionate numbers in Lee's army and suffered more casualties and injuries than their poorer brethren. What is rare about what happened in Lee's army is that rich and poor served side by side and earned respect for their cause and for each other. This rarely happened in the "real" world⁹⁷ of Thompson's day. The effect of this unequal treatment throughout all layers of society during Thompson's lifetime caused resentment that could not be quelled.

Interestingly, the hero of *City Crimes* is a man of wealth and privilege. At twenty-one Frank Sydney's uncle dies and leaves him a vast fortune; since Sydney is an orphan he has no

⁹⁷ Joseph Glatthaar "While the rich men enjoyed the pleasures of life at home, all others endured the burdens and brutality of life in uniform, and their families suffered the absence of a major breadwinner. The resulting hardships and frustrations caused severe internal dissention in the Confederacy and were the major factor in its defeat" (231).

one but himself to care for, yet he looks for ways to alleviate the suffering he sees around him.

He states:

To benefit one's fellow creatures is the noblest and most exalted enjoyments—far superior to the gratification of sense. The grateful blessings of the poor widow or orphan, relieved by my bounty, are greater music to my soul, than the insincere plaudits of my professed friends, who gather around my hearth to feast upon my hospitality, and yet who, were I to lose my wealth, and become poor, would soon cut my acquaintance, and sting me by their ingratitude. (107)

Sydney is a topsy-turvy character: on the topside he is a wealthy aristocrat who has the means to command respect. Beneath his riches, he dresses as a poor person and traverses the slums to uncover the double standard and expose how the poor are treated by the wealthy, who manipulate society to benefit themselves and indulge in all manner of sensual pleasures. Frank Sydney helps reshape many criminals who have fallen victim to poverty including the doctor—it is Sydney's wealth that allows him to rescue and redirect fallen adults' lives. The protagonist of the novel is wealthy.

George Thompson did not hail from an economically privileged background and his education was not on par with a paradigm of the canon like Nathaniel Hawthorne whose schooling was paid for and supported by his family, and whose friend, Franklin Pierce became president⁹⁸ and later offered Hawthorne a job at the Salem Custom House. Thompson was paid by the word and considered his writing a form of manual labor. As such he could more easily understand the workingman's plight. Thompson aligned his career as printer turned writer with Benjamin Franklin's. As Erickson points out in an 1850 publication of *Voices from the Press*, a

⁹⁸ Reynolds, *Mightier than the Sword* 115. "Nor was she like Hawthorne, who in his indifference over slavery penned a campaign biography of his dough-faced friend Franklin Pierce...." (115). Reynolds speaking of Harriet Beecher Stowe.

publication that contained writings of printers turned writers, including Walt Whitman:

In the volume's preface, the editor, James Brenton, defended the right of printers to express themselves, "though we cannot all be Franklins." He argued that the "chief merit" of the volume lay not so much in its literary polish, "as in the evidence it exhibits of what industry and application, unaided by wealth and patronage, can accomplish," thus stating an explicit case for a model of authorship with its roots not in a specialized knowledge of Western culture and literature, but in the experience of work in the print industry" (285-6).⁹⁹

Writing is labor and just as in Thompson's novel *Catharine and Clara, or The Double Suicide* Catharine Cotton has earned the right to look good in the silk dress, which she has worked hard to purchase, printers who know the labor of bringing the printed word to the life, have earned the right, by the fruit of their labors to become published writers. Their writing may not be as sharp and witty, but it is reflective of working class ideals as it is written by the working class.

Thompson's writing subverts the cult of domesticity and the cherished child. The corrupt bodies he sees, (even young Jack's body is tattooed with a hangman—his father's vision of his son's future) are constructed utilizing his view of society not as a cherished place, but as a place where demonic democracy has run amuck and the colonial society of the past rears its head not in the form of a monarchy, but in the form of an equally polluted plutocracy where rich versus poor and the cherished child versus the freak child. Equal opportunity needs to prevail; poor children need to have opportunities to be cherished emotionally, educationally, and financially.

The explosion of print availability and the flood of penny newspapers in the mid-

⁹⁹ Paul Erickson, "New Books, New Men: City-Mysteries Fiction, Authorship, And The Literary Market." *Early American Studies, An Interdisciplinary Journal* 1.1 (2003): 273-312.

nineteenth century allowed people from different classes to enter the country's conversation in antebellum America. Lara Cohen explains that antebellum America was shifting its shape and the concept of the body in America—the body which represented the country was under construction: “In an influential essay, the political theorist Claude Lefort has described democracy as a social space so radically indeterminate that it instigates a kind of crisis of representation” (647). The crisis or question is: who truly represents or *is* America at this time period? Is it the elite and well educated who most often get to tell *their* stories through their published works or is it the mass of workers? The cherished writers or the working class freaks? All sorts of people were voicing their views in myriad newspapers and yellow-jacketed publications in antebellum America, and George Thompson can be viewed as a public servant writing about the corruption he sees around him. Reynolds and Gladman state: “Many of the spaces in Thompson's novels also correspond to actual places in the cities he chose as settings” (li).¹⁰⁰ And Lara Cohen similarly explains: “Critics insisted that the information and discernment they provided the public promoted republican ideals of self-determination, and such claims of civic responsibility elevated editors and critics to the status of public servants” (657). Thompson in this newly established republican institution—the more egalitarian press of antebellum America--aided by the explosion of the print establishment was giving another side of the picture than that portrayed by many canonical writers; he was limning the freak show underside of the cherished child and in some cases arguing that the *others* were superior.

When Thompson has his hero, Frank Sydney, undertake his quest to do good deeds among the poor in crime ridden neighborhoods of the city, within an hour of Sydney's knight errand he sleeps with Maria, a vulnerable, pitiable young woman prostituted by her violent,

¹⁰⁰ David S. Reynolds and Kimberly R. Gladman introduction to George Thompson's *Venus in Boston and Other Tales of Nineteenth-Century City Life*. (Amherst: U Massachusetts P, 2002) li.

pimp-husband. Sydney hears the courtesan's story and decides to sleep with her instead of showing restraint and understanding; Sydney is not unlike the Knight in Chaucer's "Wife of Bath's Tale" who rapes a defenseless woman whom he is sworn to protect.¹⁰¹ The Knight, like Sydney, has a quest. The Knight in the Wife's Tale is condemned to die for his shameless behavior, but Queen Guinevere saves him providing he can answer the question: "What thing is it that women most desire?"¹⁰² Sydney in a similar fashion is a rich man living a life of luxury and excess, and he wants to answer the question: "What thing is it that the poor most desire? And the answer to both questions is similar: sovereignty."¹⁰³ Women in the Wife of Bath's Tale want power over their husbands in that patriarchal society and Sydney realizes the poor want power to meet the rich on equal footing, to have equal access to jobs and education befitting all free peoples. Both "heroes" are corrupt, but wind up happily married in the end of their respective tales. Although Thompson's message may be radical, the hero of his tale is rich and the existing social norms are validated when Sydney saves the innocent sister of the two great villainesses of the novel, and he lives happily ever after with his pure bride; and no, the happy couple does not adopt the Dead Man's freakish, recently orphaned children.

In terms of behavior towards women, the reader certainly believes more is expected of one who knows better, such as the Knight in Chaucer's tale or the hero in Thompson's tale, Frank Sydney. Yet the narrator in *City Crimes* does not condemn Sydney's behavior but simply states of Frank: "We might have portrayed thee as a paragon of virtue and chastity; we might have described thee as rejecting with holy horror the advances of that frail but exceedingly fair

¹⁰¹ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales: Nine Tales and the General Prologue*, eds. V.A. Kolve and Glending Olson (New York: Norton, 1989) 126-135.

¹⁰² Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales: Nine Tales and the General Prologue*, eds. V.A. Kolve and Glending Olson (New York: Norton, 1989) 126-135. "I grante thee lyf, if thou canst tellen me/What thing is it that wommen most desyren" (905).

¹⁰³ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales: Nine Tales and the General Prologue*, eds. V.A. Kolve and Glending Olson (New York: Norton, 1989) 126-135. "Wommen desyren to have sovereyntee" (1038).

young lady—we might have made a saint of thee, Frank. But we prefer to depict human nature as it is not as it should be;--therefore we represent thee to be no better than thou art in reality” (112). At the outset the hero is shown to be flawed, human, and sinful illustrating that *City Crimes* is a mirror of society as it truly is (as the novel’s subtitle *A Mirror of Fashion* implies) not a treatise on how a select few live, and as Sydney is a member of the wealthy class his naughty behavior would be understandable and even forgivable. A similar real life circumstance occurs when a reporter asks Helen Jewett (the infamous prostitute who was subsequently murdered in April 1836) why she became a prostitute and who caused her downfall. In answer to the reporter’s question Jewett fabricates a story of her life and the eager reporter prints the fiction as fact. “The court reporter, after printing his story of the evil merchant's son who ruined the fair Helen, wrote a private note to the young woman proclaiming his admiration for her beauty, intellect, and lovemaking skills, adding, ‘What a prize the villain had who seduced you at the Boarding School! How I should liked to have been in his place!’” (387-88).¹⁰⁴ The reporter clearly does not believe his behavior is inappropriate—he is doing what almost any man of his day would do in a similar circumstance—accept the favors of an attractive prostitute, just as Frank Sydney does. The narrator in *City Crimes* states later in the novel that the events portrayed are closely connected to reality:

Let no one say that our narrative is becoming too improbable for belief, that the scenes which we depict find no parallel in real life. Those who are disposed to be skeptical with reference to such scenes as the foregoing had better throw this volume aside; for crimes of a much deeper dye, than any yet described, will be brought forward in this tale: crimes

¹⁰⁴ Patricia Cline Cohen, “The Helen Jewett Murder: Violence, Gender, and Sexual Licentiousness in Antebellum America,” *NWSA Journal* 2.3 (1990): 374-389.

that are daily perpetrated, but which are seldom discovered or suspected. We have undertaken a difficult and painful task, and we shall accomplish it; unrestrained by a false delicacy, we shall drag forth from the dark and mysterious labyrinths of great cities, the hidden iniquities which taint the moral atmosphere, and assimilate human nature to the brute creation. (126)

Thompson here is explaining his reason for writing *City Crimes*--the novel is an expose on crime and reveals what lies beneath the oxymoronic façade of a great country where “all men are created equal...[and] are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” (375).¹⁰⁵ Thompson introduces characters such as Jack the Prig and the Image, to whom life, liberty, or even the pursuit of happiness are unrealities, unattainable, unimaginable dreams. This is the world of entombed truths that Thompson uncovers by lifting the veil, which reveals reality’s ugliness. Cathy Davidson in *Revolution and the Word* emphasizes the importance of reading novels to find out what was really going on in society during the time period the respective novel was written. She states:

The veil [Georg] Lukács would here lift is essentially the same one behind which a number of early American novelists sought to peer. As I have emphasized throughout this study because the novel as a form was marginalized by social authorities, because novelists could neither support themselves by their trade nor claim a respectable position within society because of it, the early American novel, generically and within its unique cultural moment, was ideally positioned to evaluate American society and to provide a critique of what was sorely missing in the exuberant postrevolutionary rhetoric of

¹⁰⁵ Laurie G. Kirsznner and Stephen R. Mandell eds. *The Blair Reader: Exploring Issues and Ideas*, 7th ed. (Boston: Pearson Education, 2011).

republicanism and, conversely but simultaneously, what was most dubious about an elite's jeremiads against an increasingly heterogeneous social order. (218)

Davidson also states that to suggest simply because a book was widely available and extensively read meant that it did not have a significant impact is ludicrous. "Similarly, to assume that the emergence of mass literature lessens the intensity of the reading experience is grossly inaccurate" (73). The dialectic of have and have-nots has been working itself out in American literature since the beginnings of the American novel. George Thompson at his cultural moment sees that the rich are winning the conflict and exposes the state of the poor, specifically for the purposes of this study, the poor children who have no future. And the novel is an appropriate genre for cultural analysis and commentary.¹⁰⁶ His novel is a working class jeremiad— an urban porno-gothic novel¹⁰⁷ wherein he denounces society's duplicitous wickedness.¹⁰⁸ Halttunen explains that this expose of evil can corrupt by making the writer complicit in having the reader relive the horror: "Humanitarian reformers were caught in a contradiction largely of their own making. To arouse popular opposition to the evil practices they sought to eradicate, they deemed it necessary to display those practices in all their horror . . ." (Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain" 330). Thompson has no trouble exposing the horrors of the situation to the reader. He is not unlike Barnum who figured out, "...crusading was good for business; it brought publicity and identified the entrepreneur with objects higher than the quest for profits" (*Humbug* 18).

¹⁰⁶ Bardes and Gossett, *Declarations of Independence* "Many took a strong political stance; the *North American Review* noted in 1844 that 'the novel has become an essay on morals, on political economy, and on the condition of women, on the vices and defects of social life'" (5-6).

¹⁰⁷ Karen J. Renner, "Seduction, Prostitution, and the Control of Female Desire in Popular Antebellum Fiction," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 65. 2 (2010): 166-91. "The term 'porno-gothic,' borrowed from J.V. Ridgely's study of George Lippard, is a more than apt description of many of George Thompson's novels" (175).

¹⁰⁸ Christopher Looby, "'Romance of the Real': Transgression and Taboo in American Sensation Fiction," *American Literature* 65.4 (1993): 651-672.

Dickens in his *American Notes* comments on two sets of indigent boys under the same roof in a neighborhood establishment. One set of poor boys has committed crimes and the other set, the Boylston boys, has committed no offense; the boys live under the same roof but their futures and educational opportunities are decided and decidedly different for each. Even in institutions for indigent boys with no guardians, there is a separate and unequal treatment of boys under the same roof. Dickens notes: “The juvenile offenders had not such pleasant faces by a great deal, and in this establishment, there were many boys of colour. I saw them first at their work (basket-making, and the manufacture of palm-leaf hats)...” (116). Dickens has praise for and a much better opinion of the poor boys who have committed no crimes, though he concedes if the Boylston boys were left on the streets with no way to support themselves, they too would soon have been relegated to the House of Reformation which consigns the boys therein to a future with not much hope at all.¹⁰⁹

The point of taking education, religion, civility, and a chance at decency away from Jack and the Image and turning them into exhibited freaks is to highlight the plight of impoverished children of the day, horrify the readers, and entertain them as well. At one point in the novel Thompson has a jailer giving a tour of his “shop” to upstanding, wealthy citizens. These citizens want to *see* the prison and the Dead Man who is incarcerated at the time. The people--including several ladies--do not just want to view the Dead Man because he is a criminal in jail, they want to see him because he is the vilest criminal and his face is horrifically deformed by acid; clearly they want to see the “freak show” that is the Dead Man; they are voyeurs seeking visual satisfaction not unlike the writers who come to gawk at the residents of Five Points slums. The overseer of the prison welcomes the visitors to his shop and says to the party regarding the Dead

¹⁰⁹ Dickens, *American Notes* 115-116.

Man: “I flatter myself that he will not escape a second time. Step this way, ladies and gentlemen, and view the hideous criminal” (181). The jailer sounds like a sideshow talker from Browning’s movie *Freaks*: “‘We didn’t lie to you,’ we hear the announcer saying in the first scene to a small carnival audience of which we somehow feel a part. ‘We told you we have living breathing monstrosities!’” (Fiedler 294). Ironically the Dead Man has already ensured his escape by hiding in a box with the help of another inmate, an obvious allusion to *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown*, where Henry Brown escapes slavery by mailing himself in a box from a slave to a free state which explains his middle name.¹¹⁰ The jailer mimics a showman presenting *others*; in this case the other is the worst criminal of the day, the Satan of the time period. The Dead Man even describes himself as a demonic freak: “‘Ha, ha, ha! How people shrank from me! How children screamed at my approach; how mothers clasped their babes to their breasts as I passed by, as though I were the destroying angel!’” (230). The Dead Man outwits the guard and robs the party of visitors of their freak show experience. The Dead Man says of the world: “The world plunders me—in turn, I will plunder the world!” (227). Leave it to him to deprive the spectators of their enjoyment. Although the Dead Man is an adult and responsible for his own downfall, what he does to his two sons (not to mention other children whom he murders) and their future is monstrous.

Thompson relegates two young children to abysmal futures in crime and this strikes hard at readers’ sensibilities and invites them to question everything they see around them. Lucy Bending in “From Stunted Child to New Woman” explains that one of the predominant theories

¹¹⁰ Carl Ostrowski, “Slavery, Labor Relations and Intertextuality in Antebellum Print Culture: The Slave Narrative and the City Mysteries Novels.” *African American Review* 40.3 (2006): 493-506. “Henry Box Brown acquired his middle name by having himself mailed on March 29, 1849, as a parcel from slavery in Richmond, Virginia, to freedom in Philadelphia (a 27-hour, 350 mile journey)” 494.

of child development in the nineteenth century focused on the child's physical growth; since the child was an emblem of the country, the nation's evolution is mirrored by the child's development. Children who worked long hours in factories and were deprived of sleep, proper nourishment, light, and exercise obviously did not and could not develop normally. In the early nineteenth century the belief was that childhood progression once arrested could never be mended or advanced—a stunted child was frozen in that state forever. However, later in the nineteenth century this view evolved and children arrested by cretinism were encouraged to exercise and received injections, which eventually helped them to grow and change their physical and mental carriage for the better. In terms of Thompson's characters, Jack and the Image, their physical and moral development has been permanently and deliberately arrested by their parents. The Image never sees the light of day and his stunted development equals a lifetime of infirmity. He never receives fresh air and exercise because he is believed to be an abomination—so he is kept in perpetual darkness. The Image cannot talk or articulate normally—he moans. He is an example of a child who not only will never develop, but who is *descending* the evolutionary scale and becoming animalistic. The Image's degeneration would strike a chord with Thompson's reading public.¹¹¹ And the connection between the child's decline and the Republic's descent would be clear.¹¹² Jadviga Nunes states: “The creators of American culture often employed the metaphor of the child to define the status of the new nation, which, like a child, was energetically struggling to achieve self-definition and

¹¹¹ Lucy Bending, “From Stunted Child to New Woman: The Significance of Physical Growth in Late Nineteenth-Century Medicine and Fiction,” *The Yearbook of English Studies* vol 32 *Children in Literature* (2002) 207.

¹¹² Caroline F. Leavander, “The Science of Sentiment,” ““In such a model the unique progress of which the United States is hypothetically capable depends upon American children's successfully shrugging off what scientists term their ‘savage’ origins and developing into completely ‘civilized,’ bourgeois citizens” (34).

fulfillment” (227).¹¹³ Thompson is looking behind the veil and revealing the desperation and inhumanity that he finds there in the treatment of the boys. These children and their hopeless state can predict what the country’s future will be if the rich are allowed to abuse and obliterate the poor’s children.

Kochanek in “Reframing the Freak” says: “...the most disturbing deformities, for medicine, were those which were hidden from scientific sight. Medicine, like sideshow barkers, brought deformity into view, substituting its own narratives for those of less methodical, less scrupulous and less forthright presenters of the same spectacles...” (240). Thompson, like a sideshow barker, stages Jack the Prig and the Image as freaks thereby bringing into clear sight a buried and invisible segment of society; his revelation is frightening not just because of the waste of these two children’s lives, but because of what this recklessness portends for the future of the United States and perhaps even the human race as Lurie in *Don’t Tell the Grown-ups* states: “Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny; the development of the individual parallels the development of the race” (194). The protagonist in *City Crimes* seeks out duplicity and secret sin; he visits the dark places and brings to light harsh revelations to the reader about the enormous impact of abject poverty on citizens.

In the novel the Dead Man explains that when he was only three weeks old he was left on the side of the road by his parents, and until he reached the age of fourteen, he was raised in an orphanage (227). He knows nothing about his parents but it is probable that their poverty caused them to abandon their child. The Dead Man’s impoverished condition is one factor which causes him to be so demonic in his attempt to try and get back at the world. He says at twelve years of age he realized the ways of the world: “Before me lies the world, created for the use of all its

¹¹³Jadviga Da Costa Nunes, “The Naughty Child in Nineteenth-Century American Art,” *Journal of American Studies*. 21.1 (1987): 225-247.

inhabitants. I am an inhabitant and entitled to my share—but other inhabitants, being rogues and sharpers, refuse to let me have my share” (227). Shortly after he leaves the orphanage he is arrested for murdering a man for his wallet. The Dead Man winds up in prison or as he describes it, the place where he was educated by the State--“Stone University,” a harsh prison where he spends five years. He is abused, and he becomes an abuser of his sons and everyone else.

The Dead Man’s story is similar to white slave narratives as Timothy Helwig explains and although he is writing specifically about George Lippard’s novel his comments are valid for Thompson’s *City Crimes* too.¹¹⁴ Thompson’s novel predates George Lippard’s *The Quaker City, or The Monks of Monk Hall* published in 1853 by several years; the Dead Man’s slave narrative states that he had a similar choice to Lippard’s working class hero Arthur Dermoyne: embrace pauperism and a life of suffering or find a job with painfully long hours and very little pay, which is not unlike Odysseus’s rock and a hard place dilemma; not much of a choice at all. Dermoyne suffers through a long apprenticeship where he is treated no better than a slave—instead the Dead Man in *City Crimes* chooses a life of crime to energetically and wholeheartedly exact his revenge on a world that did not offer him a fair option. The Dead Man will not choose between Scylla and Charybdis—he chooses a third option, which is to ensure others suffer at his hands. The Dead Man’s fight is with wage slavery.¹¹⁵ The two-tiered society of the haves (who have everything) and the have-nots who have to work themselves to death in order to survive, did not appeal to the Dead Man. He chose a more nefarious path for himself in order to equalize his chances of success and hurts the world that denied him equitable opportunities. Slave

¹¹⁴ Timothy Helwig, “Denying the Wages of Whiteness: The Racial Politics of George Lippard’s Working-Class Protest” *American Studies* 47.3/4 (2006): 87-111.

¹¹⁵ Carl Ostrowski, “Slavery, Labor Relations and Intertextuality in Antebellum Print Culture: The Slave Narrative and the City Mysteries Novels.” *African American Review* 40.3 (2006): 493-506. “Thus, like Thompson, Lippard relies on slave-narrative sources in the construction of his working-class fiction...The interpretation that immediately suggests itself is that Thompson’s and Lippard’s borrowings fit into the long history in US popular culture of white artists stealing material from their black counterparts and using it to reach a mass audience....” (497).

narratives and white workers' economic enslavement, exemplified in city mysteries novels are in many ways parallel experiences. "Both the city-mysteries novel and the slave narrative are based on the premise of peeling back a veneer of respectability to reveal the hypocrisy and corruption that underlie fashionable society" (Ostrowski 502). And there is borrowing of narrative techniques across the genres as Carl Ostrowski explains. Frederick Douglass borrows the ingénue character allowing the reader to peep at the destructive, sexually explicit master's behavior towards his slaves and Thompson appropriates the Henry Box Brown event to allow the Dead Man to escape from prison enclosed in a box.

Keeping in mind the point of the novel being to expose secret sin and corruption wherever it leads, Thompson shows us that it leads everywhere: religious leaders, parents, children, wives and husbands, rich and poor are corrupt. The minister in the novel, the Reverend Mr. Ballum Flanders, is immoral as is seen in the courtesan's story at the beginning of the novel.¹¹⁶ He not only has an affair with the Maria's mother, but also tries to seduce Maria when she was just a child and is probably the cause of her becoming a prostitute. The religious anchor of society appears to be humble and pious, yet he is a lecher beneath his minister's garb—a reverend rake—a recognizable oxymoronic trope. Not only are the ministers corrupt, the husbands are corrupt—Frederic Archer pimps out his wife Maria for money and threatens to beat her if she refuses to comply with his wishes that she *entertain* the "friends" he brings home each night.¹¹⁷ Frederick Archer eventually stabs his wife in the heart killing her. She dies in Frank

¹¹⁶ George Thompson, *City Crimes*: "Finally it was arranged that Mr. Flanders should pay my father a considerable sum of money, upon condition that the affair be hushed up.—My mother was promised forgiveness for her fault..." (121).

¹¹⁷ Thompson, *City Crimes*. Maria Archer: "'After this event, I attempted no further opposition to my husband's infamous scheme of prostituting myself for his support. Almost nightly, he brought home with him some *friend* of his..." (123).

Sydney's arms.¹¹⁸ The Dead Man marries the wife of a man he murders, Mr. Ross. He corrupts his wife and indoctrinates his children by her into a life of unimaginable darkness and crime. The ministers, husbands and wives are corrupt; the children are corrupted and society is one big wasteland of immorality due to an unequal access to opportunities and wealth.

The display of society's bleak moral fiber continues with Frank Sydney's own fiancé, Julia Fairfield. She appears virginal and demure yet she is having an affair with her black servant Nero, conceives by her lover, and when she is nearly full term goes for a visit where she delivers, and dumps the baby's body in the river: "The next morning after her visits to the house on Washington Street, the newspapers contained a notice of the discovery of the body of a newborn mulatto child, in the water off the Bowery. That child was the offspring of Miss Julia and the black; it had been strangled, and its body thrown into the water" (126). The child is a mirror of society. Whereas the genteel writers of the cult of domesticity offer readers a view of city life that is domestic, beautiful and full of the cherished child's potential, Thompson shows us another version of reality wherein children mirror what they see and experience in society, and Jack the Prig and the Image reflect back to the reader the corruption and abuse they have experienced in the Dark Vaults with their father the Dead Man, their abused, demented, vampiric, mother, and the village that raises them--the murderers and prostitutes of the *Jolly Knights of the Round Table*. This is the romance of the real as Thompson sees it, not the cult of domesticity where corruption and deprivation are concealed, and beauty and all that is illustrative of the angel in the house prevails.

There are no angels in the Dark Vaults, and although the treatment and hopelessness of Jack the Prig's life is horrible, it does not compare with that of his handicapped and deformed

¹¹⁸ Thompson, *City Crimes*: "He then drew from her bosom the reeking blade of the assassin, and as he did so, the warm blood spouted afresh from the gaping wound, staining his hands and garments with gore" (155).

brother's predicament. The Image is kept in isolation except for the people his father imprisons in his dungeon. Thompson insists that his view of society is real and that the sentimentalized romances of the nineteenth century are simply fictionalized sugar coated views of society. Looby in "George Thompson's 'Romance of the Real,'" discusses Thompson's belief that reality trumps fiction. There is nothing as frightening as what the poor experience each and every day and nothing as corrupt as the wealthy libertines who exercise unprecedented power (legal and otherwise) over the poor. Looby explains that Thompson felt that romances of his day "...performed an almost total evasion of the dire facts of rampant criminality, massive social and economic inequality, and moral corruption that would be the chief objects of his own literary attention" (651-2). In showcasing *The Image*, Thompson implies that the freak show is normalcy and the depiction of everyday life as domestic bliss is anomaly. Thompson's version of the "romance" was more in line with the inquiry into the slum conditions in 1857 where investigators were flabbergasted and aghast at what they found and reported that if they were to write about the conditions they actually uncovered, the public would think it was high fantasy—nothing that horrible could actually exist (252).¹¹⁹ And as Stewart in "Consuming George Thompson" reminds us: "The main audience for cheap, sensationalistic reading was the large numbers of workingmen who filled antebellum cities" (235). Thompson knew his audience would recognize his "romance" as reality not sentimental nonsense.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Christopher Looby, "'Romance of the Real': Transgression and Taboo in American Sensation Fiction," *American Literature* 65.4 (1993): 651-672.

¹²⁰ David S. Reynolds, *Mightier than the Sword: Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Battle For America*, (New York: Norton, 2011) 155. "City-mysteries writers had described the Northern city as a horrifying place where the heartless 'upper ten' (well-to-do hypocrites) maltreated or neglected the 'lower million,' the less fortunate member of society who often fell into indigence or vice. Many of these novels described wretchedness among the poor" (155).

The depiction of the Image in the text bears looking into to understand the depth to which Thompson descends to exhibit his freak kid show. Frank Sydney encounters the Image and describes what he sees:

It was of pygmy size, its shrunk limbs distorted and fleshless, and its lank body covered with filthy rags; its head, of enormous size, was entirely devoid of hair, and the unnatural shape as well as the prodigious dimensions of that bald cranium, betokened beastly idiocy. Its features, ghastly and terrible to look upon, bore a strange resemblance to those of the *Dead Man!* And its snake-like eyes were fixed upon Frank with the ferocity of a poisonous reptile about to spring upon its prey. (203)

Is *this* the corporeal body America was coalescing into in antebellum America as Lara Cohen suggests? If the Image mirrors American society at this time period then Thompson's writing is not porno-gothic but non-fiction.

Frank Sydney attempts to communicate with the Image, but the inarticulate, reptile-like freak can only wail and move away into the darkness. When Frank encounters the Dead Man's wife (the former Mrs. Ross), she admits that the Image is their child and that they are afraid to kill him. She says that the Image's deformity is the judgment of God upon them, so they lock him away in the Dark Vaults keeping him out of their sight and mostly out of their minds. She is in line with people's views in ancient times as Fiedler explains: "Even the ritualized murder of Freaks, however, seemed in ancient times to verge on sacrilege, and its incidence, therefore, was much lower than we might suppose" (*Freaks* 21). The Dead Man and his wife refuse to murder their freak son (although they murder many others) as he is believed to symbolize their corruption and God's judgment. To his parents in the text and readers alike, the Image is a morality mirror reflecting monstrous elements of society.

The Dead Man's wife does exercise some power; but she does not have the authority to do away with her monstrous son, the Image. He is there as a reminder of his parents' culpability in his existence and his descent. Douglas in *The Feminization of American Culture* discusses the prominence and power mothers began to exert in antebellum America: "The American mother of the mid-nineteenth century, encouraged to breast-feed, oversee, and educate her child, was theoretically assuming, for better and worse, almost godlike prominence" (75). Jack and the Image's mother should have been empowered enough to promote and aide her children, yet instead of assuming "godlike prominence" she adopts a vampiric role attempting to drink Frank Sydney's blood¹²¹ and morally exsanguinating her children's chances for a bright future; ensuring instead their degeneration and demise. Mary Ann Mason describes the powerful role mothers assumed in educating their children in the nineteenth century—as the birthrate had declined markedly mothers had more time to spend with the children to educate and elevate them: "Thus, it was the mother's role, as conveyor of moral values, to ensure that her child was not corrupted by the world" (52). The Dead Man's wife instead of taking an important role in her children's education is abused by her husband and has an equal hand in the children's debasement unlike the perception of mothers at this time.¹²² Thompson is suggesting that morality and maternal comfort is intimately tied to one's socioeconomic status. However, in one respect the Dead Man's wife is a model nineteenth-century woman because she is submissive to her husband's demands. She is a victim of his desires, in every sense, but she does fulfill the role Patmore suggests women should satisfy in his famous poem, as Bohleke explains: "Coventry Patmore's poem 'The Angel in the House' which idealized the total self-abnegation and willing

¹²¹ Thompson, *City Crimes* "Thy heart would have made me a brave breakfast, and I would have banqueted on thy life-blood!" (204)

¹²² Ryan, *Empire of the Mother* "Motherhood...now gave the female parent responsibility for the whole process of childhood socialization" (56).

victimization of the perfect woman” (123).¹²³ The Dead Man’s wife, formerly Mrs. Ross, does not even have a name--as we never find out what the Dead Man’s real name is--however, she willingly acquiesces to his evil plans for his victims and his hideous plans for his sons’ future in the dystopic Dark Vaults. Although the Dead Man kills his wife’s former husband, Mr. Ross, blinds her two children by Mr. Ross and then cuts their throats, she does not recognize him as the villain who caused her tribulations. Since the Dead Man had deformed his face with acid she does not realize he is the same man who destroyed her happiness. She clings to him because with the loss of her husband her financial status was also lost, and she was debased morally as well as economically by Mr. Ross’s death. She is attracted to the Dead Man because he is the antithesis of all she was before her husband and children were murdered. The Dead Man likes her perverse spirit and realizes he can use her. He says of Mrs. Ross: “I saw that her brain was topsy-turvy, and it rejoiced me” (231). She journeys from the picture of domestic bliss with her former husband and twins, to the Dead Man’s woman who is broken--her mind is fractured. As Lurie explains regarding the stages of childhood: “This creature is a savage whose principal interest is survival” (194), and after her husband’s murder Mrs. Ross’s principal interest is survival. She descends the evolutionary scale and becomes primitive threatening to drink Sydney’s blood. Since the Dead Man could not make use of her two blind children in his dark schemes, he slits their throats and dumps their bodies in the sewers. Mrs. Ross is similar to a victimized woman featured in a poem by M.W. in *Godey’s* in 1852. Her fiendish husband wants to know if she will leave him and she replies “Never!”¹²⁴ Even if the husband is the worst criminal, the wife stands by his side in the poem and here in Thompson’s novel Mrs. Ross stands

¹²³ Karin J. Bohleke, "Americanizing French Fashion Plates: *Godey's* and *Peterson's* Cultural and Socio-Economic Translation of *Les Modes Parisiennes*." *American Periodicals: A Journal of History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 20.2 (2010): 120-155. *Project MUSE*. Web. 22 Jan. 2011.

¹²⁴ Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Anchor, 1977): 73.

by her Dead Man. She may be the victim of the time when men, especially working class men, are negotiating their places and in order to be upwardly mobile they abuse women; since Mrs. Ross was an upper class woman, the Dead Man brings her down and in the process hopes to elevate his status. Mrs. Ross is similar to Helen Jewett in that "...Jewett represented the corrupt classes that had long excluded lower-class artisans..." and Mrs. Ross and Jewett suffer a similar fate.¹²⁵

Reynolds and Gladman discuss Thompson's Barnumesque use of characters in *City Crimes*—the Dead Man most probably was modeled after the woman with "Death's Face," and other freakish characters one could recognize. They state: "The Dead Man, along with his criminal cronies, occupies Manhattan's subterranean tunnel networks, called in the novel the Dark Vaults, which, in Thompson's portrayal, are a nightmarish version of Barnum's museum" (xxxiii). Thompson was competing with other antebellum writers of city crimes fiction in America and with Eugene Sue's, *Les Mysteres de Paris* in France; he marketed his characters as if they were exhibits at Barnum's popular American Museum. The sideshow of the children and their hopeless state is truly grotesque, yet entertaining in the way he takes the most sacred state of childhood and turns it topsy-turvy. Thompson enacts what Bogden in *Freak Show* states is the basic premise of freak shows; the person on exhibit is a curiosity, but clearly an inferior: "In the exotic mode the emphasis was on how different and, in most cases, inferior the person on exhibit was" (108). This motif can be employed in terms of rich versus poor. Juxtapose the cherished child of the cult of domesticity with the ragged, poor, freak-child who inhabits the Dark Vaults of New York City and the cultural other is an inferior freak because of socioeconomic

¹²⁵ David Anthony, "The Helen Jewett Panic: Tabloids, Men, and the Sensational Public Sphere in Antebellum New York" *American Literature* 69.3 (1997): 487-514. "Such works thus also suggest what Bennett's treatment of Jewett herself makes clear—that relations between men were often negotiated by means of a structure in which female characters acted as the mediating, often abused third term" (491).

circumstances. Just as in Barnum's museum highbrow and lowbrow intersected—with the investigation of freakish entertainment also came education: “Yet education and entertainment often merged in tense, if profitable, collaboration around the display of freaks” (27). It was not just the working class who visited Barnum's American Museum, but the movers and shakers of the day like writers, philosophers, politicians and other wealthy powerful members of society.¹²⁶ During a period when the child was cherished and nourished not just bodily but morally, to stage children as freaks instead of protecting them is shocking and as Barnum knew, shocking brought in customers. As Crain states: “Childhood had become a kind of museum of behaviors and artifacts no longer sanctioned or otherwise possible for adults” (547). Thompson turns this notion topsy-turvy. His freak children are forced to imitate corrupt adults' behaviors. Children should be protected and encouraged to play and enjoy an Eden-like existence before they are forced into the heavy responsibilities of the adult world. Jack and the Image are freaks because they are catapulted into an adult world of hideous crimes; they associate with murders and prostitutes; the Dark Vaults are their museum and the *Jolly Knights* ensure these children will have a hellish future instead of a cherished childhood.

Sydney is frightened by the Image, but feels sympathy for his brother, Jack the Prig. He is a wealthy man and he finds poverty abhorrent—he does what he can, but he does not save the children, perhaps because it is such a huge undertaking even for a very rich man. He helps turn the doctor around, and he does, knight-like, save the damsel in distress, Sofia, from being violated and eventually marries her. Perhaps the romantic plot line where a woman's honor is threatened is more titillating than saving and educating freakishly debased children. Sydney has

¹²⁶ Adams, *Sideshow U.S.A.*, “In addition to the working-class audiences that formed their primary constituency, they were attended by authors, artists, politicians, scientists and philosophers. Their appropriation within literature, museum arts, and scholarly criticism is a reminder that innovation does not always trickle from top to bottom; popular culture has regularly served as rich inspiration for more elite representational forms” (4).

been blessed with good fortune and the Dead Man, Jack and the Image have not. Although Frank says he would like to have the opportunity to some day rescue Jack, the opportunity never arises in the novel and we exit the text with no hope for either child: “‘Would it not be a deed of mercy,’ thought our hero—‘to take the poor boy from his unnatural parents, and train him up to a life of honesty and virtue? If I ever get the father in my power, I will look after the welfare of this unfortunate lad’” (200). But he *does* get the Dead Man in his power and Jack and the Image are forgotten and mentally disposed of by the hero and the readers--just as they are disposed of by their own parents. Sydney could have helped the freaks, especially since their mother and father are dead at the end of the novel; they orphans need a home, but Sydney’s is not available.

The fascination with the freak children in Thompson’s novel may be explained by James Steintrager’s review of Michael Newton’s *Savage Girls and Wild Boys*. Newton’s theory of why feral children or freaks captivate us is: “...that feral children ultimately fascinate us because they tap into our notion of the marvelous, making this one of the true, positive marks of humanity” (682). Frank is afraid when he hears the moans and wails of the Image, but he cannot turn away from the boy and opens the freak’s locked cage in order to confront the abomination and wonder at the child’s parentage and dark existence.

Frank Sydney discusses the duplicity of his friends at the beginning of the novel. They are corrupt and would never associate with him if he lost his money and neglected to pay for their drinks. It is noteworthy that in this working class novel, written by a man who considered writing manual labor, the hero is wealthy and flawed. Frank is a wealthy man with a heart of gold and although he is a member of the class Thompson uncovers as deceptive and duplicitous Frank sets an example of how wealthy people should use their power and wealth; they should use it to help those in needs and tip the scales more equitably towards the honorable and suffering

lower classes. He knows the poor people's plight—he dresses as a poor tramp, yet needs his wealth and status to help those less fortunate. Oxy-moronic characters people this novel about this inequitable society—antebellum America.

The disguise used by the Dead Man to cloak his hideous countenance allows him to move in a society where an indigent orphan has not earned (and never will earn) a seat at the table, and Francis Sydney's mask of poverty allows him to penetrate the depths of poverty and attempt to right the scales of justice which can only be accomplished through his wealth and power. Not unlike Eugene Sue's avenger, who similarly disguises himself as a righter of wrongs, Sydney attempts to use his socioeconomic status to save certain people: Sophia's innocence is saved; the doctor's career is saved; but far too many others cannot be saved. Jack and the Image, the helpless freaks, are left orphans and perhaps reenact their father's horrific crimes. Just as the Dead Man's parents abandoned him and he becomes one of the most nefarious criminals in history, perhaps his tutelage of Jack and the Image ensures that their lives will be similarly polluted for as Adams in *Sideshow U.S.A.* explains: "Along with family history, freakishness can be passed from one generation to the next..." (20). The Dead Man's mask helps him rise up to be someone he is not allowed to be—a powerful force with insider knowledge of the corrupt city, instead of a powerless victim. He is a weighty, notorious criminal whose intimate understanding of the Dark Vaults beneath the respectable city landscape enables him to eek out a better financial existence than he would have otherwise been able to in this segregated society. Sydney's mask allows him to descend, yet he, of course, returns to his rich position; that is where his power and status originate. The doctor, who is saved by Sydney, eventually destroys the Dead Man so that Sydney's hands are not sullied by the brutal murder and the unconventional anti-domesticity novel ends quite conventionally with Sydney's second purer marriage to the

spotless Sophia, and the promise of the “happily ever after motif” being maintained at least for this economically privileged couple. The lifting of the veil and the sight of the corrupt ruling class rich is partially assuaged by the rich protagonist’s goodness. Sydney has attempted to use his powers to alleviate the suffering he chooses to see in his own neighborhood. He tries to heal some of the deep wounds of the working-class, as much as his wealth and status enable him to do. The freaks Jack and the Image are left orphaned, lonely and entombed in the Dark Vaults similar to many of Poe’s heroes and heroines, because they are too monstrous and beyond succor. As Dayan in “Amorous Bondage” explains of Poe and her analysis is equally adept for Thompson’s freaks: “Poe’s gothic is crucial to our understanding of the entangled metaphysics of romance and servitude. What might have remained local historiography becomes a harrowing myth of the Americas” (241). Thompson’s rich hero Frank Sydney is afforded a happily ever after life; Thompson’s romance of the real mirrors a society wherein freak children are entombed.

Chapter 3 Pearl: The Freak Child Mirrors Society in *The Scarlet Letter*.

“Mother,” cried she, “I see you here. Look! Look!” Hester looked, by way of humoring the child; and she saw that, owing to the peculiar effect of this convex mirror, the scarlet letter was represented in exaggerated and gigantic proportions, so as to be greatly the most prominent feature of her appearance. In truth, she seemed absolutely hidden behind it. Pearl pointed upward, also, at a similar picture in the headpiece; smiling at her mother, with the elfish intelligence that was so familiar an expression on her small physiognomy. That look of naughty merriment was likewise reflected in the mirror, with so much breadth and intensity of effect, that it made Hester Prynne feel as if it could not be the image of her own child, but of an imp who was seeking to mould itself into Pearl’s shape. (97)

In chapter seven of *The Scarlet Letter* Nathaniel Hawthorne utilizes fun house mirrors to enlarge the reflected image of Hester’s scarlet letter so that it all but eclipses her and is therefore more torturous than usual. Hawthorne’s adept use of mirrors to exaggerate the “A” for effect shows a familiarity with carnivals and fun house tactics. Hawthorne enjoyed the company of the masses, participated in tavern gossip, attended pantomime theatre, and was a keen observer of his world. He constructs Pearl as a microcosm of nineteenth century America. Pearl, mirror like, reflects cultural information back to the reader about society’s fascination with freaks. Pearl, the freak child helps illuminate the community, flaws and all, and the displayed freak is not the only object of curiosity as nineteenth century America is also on display.

In a not unrelated carnivalesque event, Hawthorne’s father sailed aboard the *America* and the notebook log of the voyage 1795-1796 describes, as part of its homebound cargo, the first elephant ever transported to America by Captain Jacob Crowninshield. The elephant was brought over and sold for an enormous sum and exhibited to the public. The log book was one of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s favorite treasures. Hawthorne added the “w” to his ancestors’ name because, “...he thought he had discovered that it was the original spelling.”¹²⁷ Nathaniel Hawthorne Sr. was instrumental in conveying this exotic mammal that would be viewed at various exhibits, fairs and circuses, and exotic was good for business: “Exotic things, Barnum was

¹²⁷ Rev. of *The Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The North American Review* 99.205 (1864): 539-557.

discovering, attracted bigger crowds.”¹²⁸ Hawthorne’s son is aware of the intense competition for readers and in an attempt to attract “bigger crowds” to his text presents potential readers with an exotic Arabesque looking woman, Hester Prynne, and her freak child Pearl, who is equally worthy of readers’ attention. Pritchard says of Hawthorne: “There is always that air of quaintness, of oddity of the strange, the out-of-the-way that pervades the very texture of his prose...” (761). Pearl is illustrative of this bizarre quality in *The Scarlet Letter* and Hawthorne utilizes her as a sideshow barker would, to attract consumers to his text. It is noteworthy in terms of the superabundant existing criticism on Hawthorne to consider this new and intriguing interpretation of Pearl in *The Scarlet Letter* viewed through the lens of the circus sideshow freak, and to document the substantial influence P.T. Barnum’s adept advertising skills has on the text.

Hawthorne, touching back to his Puritan ancestry in an attempt to understand and heal old wounds, writes the quintessential American novel *The Scarlet Letter*, which was published in 1850. As Milder explains: “The past for Hawthorne may have possessed a genuine moral weight absent from the present...” (573). Hawthorne believed the present lacked morality, so he created a weighty narrative about sin that tellingly examines the history of American colonists, while remaining firmly entrenched in nineteenth century mores as a way, through the past, of sounding the present. Whereas George Thompson’s freak children are irreparably damaged and offer the reader no hopeful future in *City Crimes*, Pearl--the freak child of Hawthorne’s mid-century circus novel--begins as an anathema, but is redeemed and redemptive. Pearl offers the reader hope, albeit a glimmering optimism. She is the vehicle of her parents’ salvation; the freak saves her parents, becomes humanized, and helps expose secret sin so that it can be forgiven. At the end of the novel she is the richest heiress in the New World and takes her place in *another*

¹²⁸ Catherine M. Andronik *Prince of Humbugs: A Life of P.T. Barnum* (New York: Antheneum, 1994) 28.

society as a prominent, caring woman and mother. Ironically, the child who is described as demon offspring is responsible for saving the holiest Puritan minister's soul; Pearl is the demonic savior and embodies the oxymoronic spirit of Hawthorne's time.

This chapter will investigate *The Scarlet Letter* through the freak show lens, provide close readings of the text to substantiate P.T. Barnum's influence on the way Nathaniel Hawthorne presents Pearl as a freak, and highlight the influence Hawthorne's carnivalesque novel has had on American literature even in our own times. Hawthorne's novel is steeped in nineteenth century American life. Directing scholars, critics and readers to view Hawthorne's famous novel through the lens of the sideshow situates Hawthorne as a man deeply engaged in the sensational aspects of his time, as the novel truly is a freak show.

Hawthorne through the circus lens, darkly:

Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter* was famous even in its day, and the author seamlessly entered the annals of American literature.¹²⁹ Hawthorne deftly marries dark and light imagery in the novel when he gives us the sacred sinful minister in Dimmesdale; the fallen "Able" woman in Hester; the healing torturing physician in Chillingworth, and the demonic savior in Pearl. The freak child is the unlikely moral adjudicator of the town and as an other, she successfully promotes healing of the community's secret sins.

It is worth noting that Hawthorne was praised by P.T. Barnum in the showman's 1891 sketch about his excursion to England, "A Trip Abroad." Barnum begins the piece by stating: "I have been asked to describe the impressions formed during my recent visit to Europe. I do not

¹²⁹ William H. Pritchard, Rev. of "Reading Hawthorne" *The Hudson Review* (1994): 757-764. "...Richard Brodhead points out that...Hawthorne has always been there, has from the outset and continuously been a canonical classical presence, in fact—and unlike even Emerson—'the only major American author never to have been underestimated'" (757).

pretend to possess the subtlety of our great author, Hawthorne....” (696). This illustrates Barnum’s admiration of Hawthorne and shows that Hawthorne was a noted author in the nineteenth century. Similarly, Henry Giles praised *The Scarlet Letter* and its author in his 1854 *Illustrations of Genius*: “No writer has this country produced that is more distinctive than Nathaniel Hawthorne. ...It [*The Scarlet Letter*] is the most decisive production of the author and one of the remarkable stories of the age” (66).¹³⁰ This praise came only four years after the publication of Hawthorne’s most famous novel. Similarly, Anthony Trollope wrote an essay touting Hawthorne’s genius and “that weird, mysterious, thrilling charm” which he found present in Hawthorne’s works.”¹³¹ Hawthorne was an admired writer in his own time and in 1879 Henry James said: “...Hawthorne is the most valuable example of the American genius,” (2) although one must keep in mind that James’s praise is not unlike Hawthorne’s own ambiguousness towards his characters—both writers simultaneously praise and demean. Hawthorne sat for his portrait in Matthew Brady’s gallery in Washington, and when Abraham Lincoln was photographed there, he was posed similar to Hawthorne, sitting in the same chair.¹³² Hawthorne’s fame is not news, as this fact has successfully been discussed; however, Hawthorne has been erroneously described as being detached and disengaged from his time. Viewing Pearl and the novel through the lens of a P.T. Barnum freak show illustrates how thoroughly engaged Hawthorne was in the cutting edge events of his time. Milder describes Hawthorne’s published writings versus Hawthorne’s more authentic self as is illustrated in his notebook writings: “In contrast to the sin-obsessed early tales, the notebooks seem comfortably voyeuristic in their

¹³⁰ Henry Giles, *Illustrations of Genius, In Some of Its Relations To culture And Society*. Author of “Lectures and Essays.” Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1854.

¹³¹ qtd. in William Pritchard Rev. of “Reading Hawthorne” *The Hudson Review* (1994): 757.

¹³² Rita K. Gollin, “The Matthew Brady Photographs of Nathaniel Hawthorne,” *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1981): 379-391. “Celebrities such as Lincoln and Whitman felt gratified to be photographed at Brady’s gallery in Washington, where Brady often posed them with the same armchair and marble-topped table evident in Hawthorne’s photographs” (382).

fascination with the body and with sexuality” (563), which interestingly parallels Barnum’s freak show exhibits as Hawthorne enjoys watching the people shows all around him. Barnum had a knack for knowing what would sell and what the audiences would be interested in viewing, and Hawthorne, as a lover of the inexhaustible parade of life, is influenced by the showman’s pizzazz.

Hawthorne completed five novels: *Fanshawe*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *The House of the Seven Gables*, *The Blithedale Romance*, and *The Marble Faun*, and composed numerous short stories such as: “Young Goodman Brown” (1835), “The Minister’s Black Veil” (1836), “Dr. Heidegger’s Experiment” (1837), “Earth’s Holocaust” (1844), and “Rappaccini’s Daughter” (1844) to list a few. With *The Scarlet Letter*, it is as though the author of Grandfather’s Chair is sitting in that comfortable seat informing America about its Puritan past. Hawthorne has come down to us as a great storyteller because he intricately weaves the elements of his time into dark, emblematic tales.¹³³ He was criticized for avoiding writing about an important issue of his time--slavery, and Henry James says of him: “He was not a man with a literary theory.”¹³⁴ He died before the end of the Civil War, was not an abolitionist, and was thought to be pro-slavery. Sophia Hawthorne lovingly explains her husband’s mind in their common journal:

My thought does not yet compass him. He rises upon me daily like a new sun. It is so refreshing to find one person without theories of any kind, without party or sectarian tendency, free from earthly clogs, & floating like a star on its own way, without rule

¹³³ Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance* “The Hawthorne tales and novels that have most pleased posterity show that Hawthorne lived truly for his own age and absorbed its native force from the ephemeral writings he studied so closely—writings full of examples of the paradox of immoral didacticism” (114).

¹³⁴ Henry James, *Hawthorne* (Ithaca: Great Seal of Books 1956) 3. “...he was guiltless of a system...”

except GOD'S hand. This is one secret of his perennial charm & newness. He lives, transparent to Heaven & pure Thought, & can thought be exhausted?¹³⁵

Mrs. Hawthorne sees her husband flatteringly as “free from earthly clogs,” yet he was described as being “...dismayed by the Civil War....”¹³⁶ Ronda even suggests that Hawthorne fled to Europe with his wife because of his pro-slavery views.¹³⁷ Henry James in his deprecating praise goes so far as to say that Hawthorne had no “appreciable philosophy at all—no general views that were in the least uncomfortable.”¹³⁸ Or is it more accurate that Hawthorne observes and digests his time and serves it up to the reader through a more manageable, understandable, and entertaining lens? Hawthorne presents us with the image of the reverend rake through Dimmesdale; yet Dimmesdale is not salacious, but suffering and sorry. In a way Hawthorne sterilizes infected members of his contemporary society and presents a microcosm or miniature version of nineteenth century America set in Puritan times, but with recognizable antebellum sideshow elements.

In George Thompson's *City Crimes* the despicable Dr. Sinclair has an affair with his young, beautiful parishioner Josephine. It is a sordid affair where the minister is happily duplicitous and exacts promises from Josephine to ensure her silence and allow them to continue their tryst. Dr. Sinclair is a recognizable reverend rake. The Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale is in a similar position with his parishioner Hester Prynne, yet their affair takes place only once, and it is clear that the event has destroyed Dimmesdale's image of himself and upended his world.

¹³⁵ Nicholas R. Lawrence and Marta L. Werner eds., *Ordinary Mysteries: the common Journal of Nathaniel and Sophia Hawthorne 1842-1843*. (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2005) 181.

¹³⁶ Rita K. Gollin, “The Matthew Brady Photographs of Nathaniel Hawthorne” (390).

¹³⁷ Jana Nidiffer Rev. of *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody: A Reformer on Her Own Terms*, by Bruce A. Ronda, *History of Education Quarterly* 41.1 (2001): 122-124. “Perhaps the most intriguing was Ronda's explanation of why Hawthorne and Peabody's sister, Sophia, fled to England in the 1860s: Nathaniel's discreet yet discernable pro-slavery stance” (123).

¹³⁸ William H. Pritchard, “Reading Hawthorne” *The Hudson Review* 46.4 (1994): 757-764.

Dimmesdale is tortured by his fallen state. Yes, the plot is very similar; a reverend rake has an affair with one of his beautiful parishioners, yet, Hawthorne's Dimmesdale suffers, wants to make amends, and even requests that Hester tell the community his name. Dimmesdale works off his sins and the reader sees a peep show glimpse of him "wielding the bloody scourge" in order to punish himself for his crime of weakness, and hopefully, such suffering will allow him a chance at eternal forgiveness. Dimmesdale is dissimilar to Thompson's immoral minister, because Hawthorne utilizes Dimmesdale's fall as a morally didactic moment whereas Thompson allows the reader to wallow in the sordid pornographic immorality of Dr. Sinclair's and Josephine's actions. Stewart in *On Longing* uses the image of a dollhouse to explain the control exerted on the miniature: "Worlds of inversion, of contamination and crudeness, are controlled within the dollhouse by an absolute manipulation and control of the boundaries of time and space" (63). *The Scarlet Letter* is Hawthorne's nineteenth century dollhouse which exhibits the "controlled" microcosm of Puritan times.

Hawthorne embroiders American stories so that Americans see themselves as heroic, proud and sadly unsuccessful in their quest for utopia. Dimmesdale seeks perfection, but he falls short. Through Hawthorne's works Americans come to understand their strength and fallibility. His story "Endicott and the Red Cross" is nationalistic. The tale focuses on John Endicott cutting the English red cross from the colony's flag; it is a step towards independence taken decades before the American Revolution. It is emblematic of the metamorphosis that happens to immigrants here on American soil—wherever they come from, here they become Americans. Endicott rallies his people by asking them why they left their homes and came here. The answer, of course, is for freedom and self-determination. Endicott feels the current political atmosphere is stifling to the colonists, so he removes from the flag the emblem of tyranny--the English red

cross. Endicott says of cutting out the English cross from the flag: “Neither Pope nor Tyrant hath part in it now!” (118), and *it* refers to the flag which symbolizes the people of the colony and their determination to live free. And Hawthorne’s description in *The Scarlet Letter* of beefy English women not fifty years removed from Elizabeth I, as compared to their more refined and delicate American posterity, emphasizes the superiority of American women when he says of their English counterparts: “They were her countrywomen; and the beef and ale of their native land with a moral diet not a whit more refined, entered largely into their composition” (48).

These views enable the reader to see how Americans have progressed, and to understand our obsession with sin and failure because it shows that although we are imperfect seeking perfection is an honorable, if disappointing, endeavor. We come to see where we have been, to understand where we are, and to contemplate where we are going through the gamut of Hawthorne’s works. It is the hopefulness and youthful naiveté of this belief that here in America anything is possible, even achieving perfection, that enables Hawthorne to sanitize and manipulate the crass circus sideshow elements and present them to the reader in a moral spectacle. The Puritan time period in Hawthorne’s *Scarlet Letter* is peopled with anachronistic freaks from P.T. Barnum’s shows.

The engagement of Hawthorne with circus culture and the presentation of freaks in *The Scarlet Letter* allow the text to be viewed in an exciting way. This innovative perspective is Barnum’s influence on the much written about work. Phineas Taylor Barnum is an American phenomenon and one could almost say that he could not have created himself anywhere else but in nineteenth century America. Hawthorne writes his novel influenced by freaks that permeate his society; we see his engagement with his time and how the showman’s entrepreneurial skill is filtered through his parade of freaks: Pearl, Hester, Dimmesdale, Chillingworth, Mistress Hibbins, wild Indians, pirates. All these so called *others* people *The Scarlet Letter*. This novel is

like a Chaucerian journey, not to Canterbury, but to Puritan times weighted down with antebellum baggage. The word freak is used seven times in the novel and *four* of those references denote Pearl, *one* signifies Puritan children, *one* represents Dimmesdale and *one* refers to pirates. Clearly the word “freak” is seminal in the text, and Hawthorne almost exclusively associates this word with Pearl.

Although Pearl is a character in a novel about mid-seventeenth century Puritans, Hawthorne surely shaped her character cognizant of his own time. He was keenly aware of the penny newspapers, descriptions of train wrecks, and the sensationalism of his day.¹³⁹ His son Julian remembers his father seriously studying newspapers, and as one critic notes: “Hawthorne himself wrote that great literature has much in common with the most ephemeral writings and that the only way to produce enduring fiction is ‘to live truly and wisely for your own age...’” (114).¹⁴⁰ He was aware of popular sentimental fiction and the competition he faced to have his works published. Hawthorne infamously wrote to his publisher in 1855 that: “America is now wholly given over to a damned mob of scribbling women” referring to the bestselling female authors (whose works outsold his) and women editors of his day.¹⁴¹ As Frederick states: “Of the half-dozen American magazines which offered a market for fiction in the early 1850s, three were edited by women” (236). Hawthorne knew the difficulties of earning a living through writing when the rivalry was so intense. In 1842-3 he speaks of having trouble paying his bills, even though he had submitted his work to magazines: “Meantime, the Magazine people do not pay their debts; so that we taste some of the inconveniences of poverty, and the mortification-only temporary, however—of owing money, with empty pockets. It is an annoyance; not a trouble”

¹³⁹ Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance* “Hawthorne’s son Julian recalled that his father read novels for relaxation but seriously studied popular newspapers and magazines” (114).

¹⁴⁰ Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance* “...to live truly and wisely for your own age, whereby, if the native force be in you, you may likewise live for posterity” (114).

¹⁴¹ Frederick, John T. “Hawthorne’s ‘Scribbling Women.’” *New England Quarterly*. 48.2 (1975): 231-40.

(155).¹⁴² Baym informs us that *The Scarlet Letter* sold only 10,000 copies in Hawthorne's lifetime, whereas one sentimental novel, *The Lamplighter*, sold 40,000 copies a month after it was published and 60,000 more before its first year out. The women writers were more popular in mid-nineteenth century perhaps because of the large women readership, but Hawthorne's works survive whereas many of the women writers have fallen into obscurity.¹⁴³ Popularity does not translate into canonularity or canon worthiness; so posterity becomes acquainted with works that were deemed worthy by canon creators, and these works do not accurately reflect the bestsellers that antebellum readers were enjoying. Despite its comparable paltry readership, *The Scarlet Letter* was always canon worthy, and was informed by what was attracting readers to the women writers who fell into obscurity and by what was attracting patrons to P.T. Barnum's freak shows. It is worth noting that circus attendance and attendance at the nascent museums that initially displayed freaks, pandered to male audiences—it was improper for women and children to be seen in such venues, but then P.T. Barnum inaugurated the family museum and women and children were welcomed. In an article dated June 16, 1853 in *The Spirit of the Times* the author "C." talks about how soothing and enlightening a visit to Barnum's museum is. He specifically mentions "The Happy Family" which consists of enumerated animals: pigeons, monkeys, rats, cats, a dog, squirrels, a cock with three legs, Guinea pigs, mountain cat etc. all living together. The author explains that to enable these animals to get along the first step is to make sure they are all fed—that their physical needs are met. He then states: "A full stomach and a confiding heart, are mighty tranquilisers to beasts and birds, and if our politicians, especially in Europe,

¹⁴² Nicholas R. Lawrence and Marta L. Werner eds., *Ordinary Mysteries: the common Journal of Nathaniel and Sophia Hawthorne 1842-1843*. (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2005).

¹⁴³ Nina Baym, introduction, *The Lamplighter* by Maria Susanna Cummins ed. Nina Baym. (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1995) ix. "So, the argument goes, one finds the best literature of an era among its relatively eccentric and unread works (in the case of Dickinson, unpublished works)--such as *Walden*, *Leaves of Grass*, *Moby-Dick*, *The Scarlet Letter*--rather than among works that everybody was wild about at the time..." (ix).

could be persuaded to try their effects upon man, I think that Ireland, Italy, Austria, France and Germany, would not object to the experiment.” The author’s point is that there is a larger political lesson easily learned from visiting Barnum’s museum. First and foremost people need food and full stomachs to feel content. This lesson is easily seen with the various animals that peacefully and almost inexplicably coexist at the museum. “C.” begins the article by stating: “I had previously visited the Museum, as nearly every person does who stops one day in New York....” The columnist indicates that everyone visits the museum and can learn from “The Happy Family.” As A. H. Saxon explains: “For the American Museum aspired to be—and probably was under Barnum’s management—the largest and most comprehensive establishment of its kind in America” (134). Everyone visited Barnum’s Museum.

Barnum knew that to appeal to a wider audience would bring in more money; Hawthorne also knew that he needed to appeal to a wider audience to attract the same readers that were flocking to the women’s sentimental novels and freak shows. So he learns a lesson about staging freaks from P.T. Barnum. Barnum cleansed the museum image in antebellum America and made it a family place where people came to be entertained and educated. Hawthorne cleansed city crime exposés and peoples his novel with religious characters that perform a sacred sideshow.

Hawthorne was mindful of what the bestselling women writers were writing. He was aware of the corrupt ministers that were exposed in the newspapers. He knew he was competing with wildly successful women writers of the day, and with a clear grasp of his time, he presents readers with a scarlet woman who sins, and is more honest about her mistake than her duplicitous minister who keeps his holy reputation throughout the novel and only admits his carnal sin moments before he expires. Hester is a more honest minister than Dimmesdale is; she

cares for the sick. Hawthorne empowers a freak to bring her sinful parents to reveal their dark secrets. As Douglas says: “The heroine of sentimental literature is typically, as we have seen, an amateur minister handily outdoing her established clerical competitors” (157). Nathaniel Hawthorne utilizes the template of the sentimental novel and develops and deepens it. Hester does become an amateur minister as her image in the novel shape shifts from sinner to savior: “She was self-ordained a Sister of Mercy...” (148), and she helps the sick. The scarlet letter comes to mean “...Able; so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman’s strength” (148). The sinful woman ministers to the sick and despairing. Pearl also ministers to her parents. It is the freak child who outshines the Reverend Dimmesdale in terms of clerical duties. She is more instrumental in bringing to light his dark sins and illuminating Hester’s secret than the holy minister is.

The first time we meet Pearl on the scaffold with her mother, Dimmesdale asks Hester to reveal Pearl’s father; he is relieved when Hester will not reveal their secret. He says: “Wondrous strength and generosity of a woman’s heart! She will not speak!” (64). Pearl, on the other hand is always asking Dimmesdale if he will come with them noontide into town or stand on the scaffold with her and her mother. She, like a clergywoman, asks the minister to own up to his sins. “If being in public and on display marked one as degraded and different, the ability to maintain one’s privacy was a mark of class-and gendered-inflected respectability,” as Pearson in “Infantile Specimens” states (342). Therefore Hester and Pearl are marked as “different” and “degraded” because Hester’s sin is known. Dimmesdale’s secret is safe with Hester—she will not tell. Hester does seem to retain some measure of privacy in that she will not tell that which she feels is the most private part of the secret, namely the name of her partner in crime. Although she is exposed, caught, and made to wear an ignominious red letter, she does not reveal

all.¹⁴⁴ At the beginning of the first baby shows in America, babies were presented, staged, gawked at and literally judged by members of society. Communities were scandalized by this blatant invasion of the domestic sphere. Babies and mothers were the very heart of the domestic sphere and should not, many said, be publically displayed and judged. Pearson explains: “It was precisely this tension between public and private—and the role of objectifying spectacle in destroying those distinctions—that so vexed the baby show’s many critics” (347). Hester and Pearl are shown to the community in a violation of the domestic sphere from the first pages of Hawthorne’s work. Perhaps that makes Hester another oxymoronic character, as she is respectably degraded. Whereas she ascends in the town’s eyes, Dimmesdale’s secret sin is cowardice, which ensures his descent.

Hawthorne was cognizant of fads of the day, which came to permeate his novels “...and his delight in the raffish underside of life remained with him until the 1850s, when fame, middle age, and Victorian propriety combined to suppress it.”¹⁴⁵ He partook in the wildly popular custom of exchanging and requesting photographs of friends; he enclosed his own image when writing to friends and close acquaintances as Gollin states: “...what is most interesting is Hawthorne’s easy compliance with the current ‘cartomania’” (388). The intriguing thing is that although he immersed himself in the Puritan times in his writing, he enjoyed the current innovations and fads and was not solely focused on the weighty Puritan past.

It would not take a fun house trick mirror to tease out the current fads and obsession with freaks in Hawthorne’s *Scarlet Letter*. There are mirror images throughout the novel: Hester

¹⁴⁴ Susan J. Pearson, “‘Infantile Specimens’: Showing Babies in Nineteenth-Century America.” *Journal of Social History* 42. 2 (2008): 341-370. “It was precisely this tension between public and private—and the role of objectifying spectacle in destroying those distinctions—that so vexed the baby show’s many critics” (347).

¹⁴⁵ Robert Milder, “The Other Hawthorne.” *The New England Quarterly* 81.4 (2008): 559-95. “Hawthorne had developed an affinity for the common in his youth while accompanying his uncle Samuel Manning on horse-buying expeditions...Hawthorne was also gifted with a realist’s eye for telling surfaces” (561).

reflected in the suit of armor at the Governor's house, Pearl looking at her reflected image in the water, Hester looking into Pearl's eyes and seeing her image and her scarlet letter reflected there, and Pearl, mirror-like, recreating Hester's "A" on her own bosom in green seaweed. The new daguerreotypes infiltrate the seventeenth century tale in anachronistic fashion because the new photography was a contemporary invention, but it is evident in the Puritan times through Hawthorne's eyes. The daguerreotype reflects the reality of what it sees back to the observer, similar to a mirror. The parade of freaks, especially Pearl, people this novel with posterity phantoms that instead of accurately reflecting the seventeenth century, appear to look through a futuristic fun house mirror and reveal the nineteenth century.

Milder discusses the disconnect he sees between Hawthorne the cool, contemplative seemingly detached writer, and the lively Hawthorne of his journals. Milder suggests there are two Hawthornes. One scene used to illustrate this disconnect is described in Hawthorne's journals. In an event he details in his notebook, Hawthorne has gone to a tavern and is experiencing and enjoying the antics of the primitive American people he encounters there. Hawthorne felt comfortably at home in this environment.¹⁴⁶ A man comes in looking for Mary Ann Russel; she is a prostitute and at first glance not unlike the sexual freaks who people Thompson's and Lippard's city crimes novels. Mary Ann Russel had recently been removed from the town because she is a prostitute, and the man searching for her is, in fact, searching for his wife. Hawthorne is moved by this scene, but not in a comedic way. He contemplates the event in his journal, and expresses that he would pay much to witness the meeting of the man and his prostitute wife. Milder explains that Hawthorne never did write about such a meeting in his works. Didn't he? Of course Hawthorne wrote about it. Is not the scene when Hester on the

¹⁴⁶ Robert Milder, "The Other Hawthorne," *The New England Quarterly* 81.4 (2008): 559-95. "...he visits taverns and comments on the range of their clientele: provincial worthies, farmers, drunkards, prostitutes, pimps" (560-1).

scaffold recognizes her husband in the crowd the same scene Hawthorne contemplated in his journal? Hawthorne does write about a man coming face to face with his wife's infidelity—the text of *The Scarlet Letter* is such a study. Hester Prynne was not a prostitute, however, even in the nineteenth century Fessenden tells us that a woman walking alone in the evening could be arrested for prostitution.¹⁴⁷ Hester is guilty of meeting the minister in the forest while she is married to another man, and in the austere Puritan time period her transgression renders her a scarlet woman for the rest of her life; because of her infidelity she is ostracized by the townspeople and her child is stigmatized. Hawthorne writes about Hester meeting her husband after two years' separation; and it is not at all hard to believe that he is in effect reimagining the meeting between the prostitute Mary Ann Russel and her devoted, simpleton husband of which he writes in his journal. Hawthorne takes the bawdy bar scene, adds the weight of the Puritan religion, a scene from an event he witnessed in his own life, and shapes his tale so that it has emotional pathos. The people in the tavern are laughing at the husband who is seeking his prostitute wife. They are joking and asking him what his wants with Mary Ann Russel. Hawthorne is touched by the scene, humanizes it and envisions the tragic meeting as heart wrenching as such an emotional scene would be to anyone with a sensitive heart. His eye has the keenness to witness a bawdy bar scene and develop it into a masterpiece of misery.

In the chapter four of the novel, “The Interview,” Hawthorne has the fallen, scarlet woman who has been displayed before the whole town with her freakish offspring speak to her husband whom she has not seen in two years. Almost in defense of her behavior, Hester tells Chillingworth that she never loved him: “I felt no love, nor feigned any” (69). Chillingworth knows, but his predicament is sad because he loves Hester and hoped his love and intelligence

¹⁴⁷ Tracy Fessenden, “The Convent, the Brothel, and the Protestant Woman’s Sphere,” *Signs* 25.2 (2000): 451-478. “A New York statute classified prostitution, like fortune-telling and juggling, as a form of disorderly conduct; under that law, any woman walking alone in the street at night could be arrested for prostitution” (460).

would mask his infirmities and eventually kindle a reciprocal feeling in his wife. Chillingworth says:

My heart was a habitation large enough for many guests, but lonely and chill, and without a household fire. I longed to kindle one! It seemed not so wild a dream,--old as I was, and sombre as I was, and misshapen as I was,--that the simple bliss, which is scattered far and wide, for all mankind to gather up might yet be mine. And so Hester, I drew thee into my heart, into its innermost chamber, and sought to warm thee by the warmth which thy presence made there! (69).

The husband and wife reunion between Mary Ann Russel and her husband of which Hawthorne writes, “I would have given considerable to witness his meeting with his wife...On the whole there was a moral picturesqueness in the contrasts of this scene...It is worth thinking over and studying out...”¹⁴⁸ The scene does indeed take place in *The Scarlet Letter*. Hawthorne does study it out and write about it, which illustrates his engagement with events of his time, and his willingness to incorporate contemporary experiences into his seventeenth century novel. The scene comes to fruition in the meeting between Hester and her husband. The fruit of Hawthorne’s studying the wealth of feelings the husband and wife would experience at such a meeting makes the scene in the novel heart-wrenching. It is not an amusing Shakespearean cuckold scene when Chillingworth comes to realize that he never should have married a woman who did not love him; it is tragic when Hester realizes how much she has hurt her husband and says, “I have greatly wronged thee.” The lives of the four main characters are ruined by Hester’s and Dimmesdale’s infidelity and a freak child is spawned. The novel is heavily influenced by Mary Ann Russel’s husband searching for his prostitute wife, which Hawthorne wrote about in his journal. Prostitutes and moral others were viewed as freaks as Frost explains: “Freaks were

¹⁴⁸ Robert Milder, “The Other Hawthorne,” *New England Quarterly* 81.4 (2008): 559-595.

often popular—and profitable—because their representation reinforced racialist attitudes and ethnocentric distinctions upheld in the dominant culture. . . . Represented as potentially dangerous and often sexualized, the freak exhibit simultaneously served to titillate and reassure the white viewer” (9).¹⁴⁹ Certainly, Hester’s behavior classifies her as tainted and her immorality could be viewed as contagious to her daughter Pearl.¹⁵⁰ The readers empathize with and learn from the freaks in this novel. Had Hester truly loved her husband, perhaps her affair with Dimmesdale might never have taken place and she would have remained safely contained within the domestic sphere.

Hawthorne takes the common tavern scene and writes about it with taste, sympathy, and delicateness. The scene between Hester and her husband is a private one to which readers are allowed a peek-a-boo glimpse. It is a scene that could be rendered laughable—a simpleton cuckold and his prostitute wife discussing her infidelity—but it is *not* laughable. There is humanity, tenderness and awfulness in the scene. Chillingworth paternally helps pacify Hester’s illegitimate child with a healing draught. Life in nineteenth century America is a Barnum freak show wherein the viewers experience a microcosm of the world around them. “In The American Notebooks of the later 1830s, the sprawling, unkempt nation seems itself a carnival for the observer discerning enough to relish its moments great or small, orchestrated or impromptu,”¹⁵¹ and Hawthorne is a discerning observer of the carnival that is nineteenth century America. The only accurate lens through which to read *the Scarlet Letter* is the Barnumesque lens because it

¹⁴⁹ Linda Frost, *Never One Nation: Freaks, savages, and Whiteness in U.S. Popular Culture 1850-1877*. Minneapolis: U Minnesota Press, 2005. “While racial understandings reproduce a set of surprisingly durable social beliefs that certain traits are fixed, inherent, and natural based on the race to whom they have been assigned, the actual figures who occupy those racial categories are constantly changing” (xii).

¹⁵⁰ Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence* “The common practice of children sleeping together, or of children sleeping with servants, was understood to spread the contagion of masturbation. . . . As the example of beliefs about masturbation shows, the child was viewed as fundamentally innocent of sexual desire unless corrupted by an outside force” (39-40).

¹⁵¹ Robert Milder, “The Other Hawthorne,” *New England Quarterly* 81.4 (2008): 559-595.

validates Hawthorne's engagement in the vicissitudes of the time. You can hear Hawthorne's voice throughout the novel: "Step right up and read about yonder scarlet woman and her demonic offspring—they say the Black Man in the forest is the freak's father—come and view the child's precocious freakishness. The freak cannot be tamed; she dances on graves, and believes she was not born, but plucked from a rose bush. Right here, step right up and hear the story and ponder its reverberations on the child's family, her minister, and the community! The Puritan minister is a reverend rake. We all know the type. He believes he has given himself to the devil that haunts the forest!"

Hawthorne attended the theatre where the pantomime "Jack the Giant Killer" was playing and he subsequently reviewed the play; his analysis allows the reader to see where his real interests lie. Hawthorne found the play rather dull and so "...he amused himself by studying the audience."¹⁵² The people are the real entertainment and afford Hawthorne ample grist for his novel's mill, and his novel is peopled with Barnumesque freaks he plucks from his real life observations. Hawthorne associates Pearl with rose bushes and specifically a red rose in the novel: Pearl seeing the rose-bushes began to cry for a red rose and would not be pacified" (). Mr. Wilson in the novel suggests that Pearl's name should, in fact, be "... Red Rose, at the very least, judging from your hue"" (101). Sylvester Judd discussing his novel *Richard Edney* which was published in 1850, the same year as Hawthorne's novel, associates the full impact of a reader's impression of the novel with the image of a rose: "A Tale is not like a house, except in its door—plate, the title page. It does not require an entry or a reception-room. It is rather like a rose, the sum of the qualities of which are visible at a glance; albeit it will repay a minute attention, and affords material for prolonged enjoyment" (v-vi). Pearl is the red rose in the

¹⁵² Randall Stewart, "Hawthorne's Contributions to The Salem Advertiser" *American Literature* 5.4 (1934): 327-41.

novel—a rose is presented to the reader at the beginning of the novel before Hester and Pearl emerge from the prison. Pearl is the freakish, thorny red rose to watch throughout.

With *The Scarlet Letter* Hawthorne crafted a novel steeped in nineteenth century America and its spectacle mindset. He was aware of P.T. Barnum and stages Pearl as a freak by whom the Puritans, ironically, would be enlightened. Pearl comfortably fits into Adams's definition of a freak: "...*freak* is not an inherent quality but an identity realized through gesture, costume, and staging" (6).¹⁵³ Pearl, through her antics, Hester's adept costuming of her, and the infant's staged entrance into society—her appearance on the scaffold in the spotlight as a three month old freak—enables the reader to see that she is the kid show in the novel.

This novel was written at the genesis of the country's first baby shows, which Susan Pearson in "Infantile Specimens" explains began at farm fairs throughout the nation, and consisted of mothers displaying their babies to the public. The private versus public sphere experienced push back with the onset of the controversial baby shows. The human children were exhibited, not as freaks, but as objects of beauty. "...[B]aby shows gave nineteenth-century Americans an opportunity to engage in a culturally significant pastime: baby-worship,"¹⁵⁴ or as one could say in baby Pearl's case, witch watching. Hawthorne presents Pearl as a freak, yet he describes her as being so beautiful that she could easily have been left in heaven as a plaything of the angels—her beauty is worth gazing at and her antics are appalling, had she been in a baby show, her beauty would have won awards. The Barnumesque presentation of Pearl shows "...Hawthorne's awareness of his age, and his energetic response to its many and varied stimuli";¹⁵⁵ Barnum was one of those stimuli and through this lens it is possible to see

¹⁵³ Adams *Sideshow U.S.A.*

¹⁵⁴ Susan J. Pearson, "'Infantile Specimens': Showing Babies in Nineteenth-Century America." *Journal of Social History* 42. 2 (2008): 341-370.

¹⁵⁵ Randal Stewart, "Hawthorne's Contributions to The Salem Advertiser" *American Literature* 5.4 (1934): 327-41.

Hawthorne's engagement in his time as his keen observations of contemporary society flood *The Scarlet Letter* and shape Pearl as a freak.

Peeks at freaks:

“This old witch-hanging city had no weirder product than this dark-haired son.”¹⁵⁶

The first time the readers see Pearl she is three months old. She has been born and kept in a dungeon-like prison with her mother, and then they are brought into the bright sunshine so that a spotlight is shone on them. Everyone stares at the spectacle of Pearl and her scarlet mother. The sins of the mother are visited upon the child for, “Along with family history, freakishness can be passed from one generation to the next....”¹⁵⁷ Hawthorne ensures Pearl is seen as the freakish offspring of a scarlet woman. Her mother is dressed wildly--not at all like an austere Puritan woman:

Her attire, which, indeed, she had wrought for the occasion, in prison, and had modeled much after her own fancy, seemed to express the attitude of her spirit, the desperate recklessness of her mood, by its wild and picturesque peculiarity. But the point which drew all eyes, and, as it were, transfigured the wearer,--so that both men and women, who had been familiarly acquainted with Hester Prynne, were now impressed as if they beheld her for the first time,--was that SCARLET LETTER, so fantastically embroidered and illuminated upon her bosom. It had the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and enclosing her in a sphere by herself. (51)

¹⁵⁶ Rev. of *The Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The North American Review* 99.205 (1864): 539-557. “He [Hawthorne] has certainly given it [Salem] an interest which it must otherwise have lacked; but he speaks of it with small affection...” (543).

¹⁵⁷ Adams *Sideshow U.S.A.* “Along with family history, freakishness can be passed from one generation to the next, much as characters in *Beloved* transmit the trauma of slavery from mother to child” (20).

So Hester illuminates her scarlet letter and writes her sin on her own body—she is a walking billboard for her sin. This is the last time in the novel we see Hester dress ornately; afterwards she will lavish her gifted style and expert needlework on elaborate clothing for her young daughter, Pearl. The first chapter focuses on the prison door from which Hester and Pearl will emerge. Hawthorne is aware of the new advancement, photography, and it is as if the novel is envisioned as a series of images seen through the new daguerreotype lens—the first camera shot of the novel is focused on the prison door. Everyone is awaiting the sinner’s exit from the jail and her walk, with the product of her sin, to the scaffold: “Hush, now, gossips! For the lock is turning in the prison-door, and here comes Mistress Prynne herself” (49). Clearly the pair is seen as inferior and an integral part of a sinful spectacle. Hester walks from the prison to the marketplace and then is displayed up high for the whole town to see: “...and was thus displayed to the surrounding multitude, at about the height of a man’s shoulders above the street” (53). The schoolchildren have been given a half-holiday so that they too can stare at Hester and Pearl, and although they are unsure of the offense mother and child have committed, they watch the spectacle unfold and know the indiscretion is a grave one. The narrator states of the procession that it was a larger than life event: “...with a whole people, drawn forth, as to a festival...” (59). Hester and Pearl are displayed to the crowd because of Hester’s moral transgression. It is not unlike a morality play wherein the sinful woman is caught in her transgression, and her story serves as a cautionary tale to the community: hidden sins will be revealed! Yet, there is much more of the theatrical involved as the community is witnessing the revelation in the sunlight of a seamy sinner’s sin--one guilty of adultery. Susan Stewart explains: “In carnival the grotesque is an exaggeration and celebration of the productive and reproductive capacities of the body, of the natural in its most sensual dimensions” (*On Longing* 107-108). The display is almost an

indecent show for the woman and child have to be exhibited to the whole community for three hours. For such a religious community to display a beautiful woman so that all members of the community can gawk at her and her child of sin is more carnivalesque than penitential. The whole town is invited to a carnival wherein Hester and Pearl are the main exhibits. As Susan Pearson argues regarding the baby shows, “Was putting babies on display and subjecting them to judgment a form of cherishing or degrading them?” (341). It is clear that Hester and Pearl in the Puritan exhibit are displayed, degraded and objectified.

The presentation of Hester and Pearl as moral freaks shows an awareness on Hawthorne’s part of the convergence of varied current cultural phenomenon. He is aware of the nascent museum culture wherein sideshow barkers solicit audiences with the proviso that along with being filled with wonder they will also be educated. Freaks bring in audiences and Hawthorne positions himself as a showman eliciting an audience not just to enjoy the beautiful woman and her “lovely child,” but to learn from their fallen state what *not* to do. He too has an educational promise: “Come see these freaks and you will learn from them.” Pearson explains, “In the context of rapid modernization and cultural fragmentation, displays of bodily difference functioned not only to establish deviance, but also normalcy” (342). Hester and by association Pearl, are outside the sphere of normalcy, but such a display of humanity by the Puritan community borders on the vulgar; the display itself is a theatrical event and in the nineteenth century, theatres were places thought to promote immorality. Hawthorne’s showing of Hester and Pearl, in this religious community is a crass display that promotes as much as punishes immorality. Similarly, “Baby shows created a forum for the public display of ‘private’ emotions and desires. Chief among these was maternal love” (Pearson 347). As a scarlet spectacle, Hester is on display because of her private sin. Throughout his freak show consisting of Hester’s and

Pearl's othering, Hawthorne does prove over and over Hester's love for her daughter Pearl, ". . . her mother's only treasure!" (*The Scarlet Letter* 82).

In theatre as well as in circus sideshows there is a contradiction in terms of morality versus immorality. As Johnson explains in "That Guilty Third Tier": "By the nineteenth century the third tier had become an understood theatrical appendage. *Femmes du pave* were welcomed into the gallery of New York's high-class Park Theater from the time of its opening in the late eighteenth century. . . . By the 1830s and 1840s, the relinquishing of the third tier to prostitutes had become an established national tradition. . ." (577). This was a fact of life in theatres until the end of the nineteenth century, and with the theatrical presentation of Hester and Pearl to the Puritan community, it is as though Hawthorne is injecting the theater's third tier into the Puritan community and analyzing its anachronistic implications. Johnson mentions nineteenth century actors and actresses on stage viewing the "other" performance being enacted by the prostitutes in the third tier in real time during the "sanctioned" show. Sometimes the prostitutes' antics were more noteworthy than the actors' performances. Which is the real show? The sideshow of the prostitutes at the theatres becomes the main event with the staging of Hester and her child of sin to the Puritan community. Their freak-peep show does more to corrupt the Puritan community than to save it.

Hester is not a prostitute, but many prostitutes in the nineteenth century were believed to have been seduced by powerful men, and such is the case with Hester Prynne, as the Puritan community believes. Chillingworth asks a stranger about Hester's sin and the stranger responds: "Now, good Sir, our Massachusetts magistracy, bethinking themselves that this woman is youthful and fair, and doubtless was strongly tempted to her fall. . ." (59). One explanation for why Hester is not put to death for her sin is that it is believed that she was seduced. The stage

historian Dunlap describes the genesis of the third tier in American theatre as an unruly place and he thought the theatre should be "...the school of national morality,"¹⁵⁸ and it was a microcosm of national morality. The theatre itself reflected the immorality of morality. A morally didactic play would be performed where simultaneously prostitutes and their customers transacted business in the third tier of the same theater.¹⁵⁹ Just so the morally austere Puritans stage Hester and Pearl in a morality play, yet the spectacle of the punishment itself lends itself to interpretation as a freak-show, peep-show event. This young, beautiful woman and her child are exposed to the whole community. Everyone is staring at Hester's scarlet letter, which is magnificently embroidered on her bosom; all eyes are drawn there. Pearson explains why there was such controversy in the nineteenth century when babies were displayed at baby shows: "In putting themselves and their offspring on display, mothers renounced fundamental canons of domesticity. They made public what should be private and they suggested that their children were, like cattle or the objects Barnum displayed at his museum, commodities" (348). If this is true in antebellum America, how much more appalling is such a public display of a young woman and her infant during the Puritan time period? Hester and Pearl are indecently exposed while Hester's partner in crime, Dimmesdale, is enfolded in the arms of the community and within the ranks of his fellow ministers and magistrates as an angel wounded by his parishioner's sin. Dimmesdale has a chance to stop the freak show exhibit, and stand with Hester and his daughter and shield them, but he leaves them all alone to be marked as pariahs of the community.

¹⁵⁸ Fred Moramarco, "The Early Drama Criticism of William Dunlap," *American Literature* 40.1 (1968): 9-14.

¹⁵⁹ Claudia D. Johnson, "That Guilty Third Tier: Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century American Theaters," *American Quarterly* 27.5 (1975): 575-584.

Hester and Pearl are marked as freaks and as such, they are segregated from society. Hester and Pearl are left to fend for themselves, so as Pearl grows up she finds many ways to amuse herself, because of her lack of friends and father. In the chapter entitled “Hester and the Physician,” Pearl is bemused by her own image in the retreating tide and beckons the reversed, reflected elf to herself. She has no one to play with, and the solitary child wants her own image to come out and play. “But the visionary little maid, on her part, beckoned likewise, as if to say, -‘This is a better place! Come thou into the pool!’ And Pearl, stepping in, mid-leg deep, beheld her own white feet at the bottom; while, out of a still lower depth, came the gleam of a kind of fragmentary smile...” (154). She, like Narcissus, is enthralled with her own image; her mirrored visage beckons from a seemingly better underworld which Pearl endeavors to join. The lonely child never has a friend and is used to being lost in her own imagination, and Hawthorne believed the shadowy world offered clear glimpses of reality. “We know that Hawthorne liked to believe ‘that the reflection is indeed the reality...that the disembodied shadow is nearest to the soul.’”¹⁶⁰ The doppelganger in the pool entices Pearl to the nether world possibly intimating that had circumstances been different Pearl’s life would have been better--*there*. What if news had come of Master Prynne’s death and Hester had married Reverend Dimmesdale? What if Hester had loved her husband, and Pearl was the product of their love? What if the freak was instead a child of domesticity embraced by both parents in a loving home and cherished by her community at large? Perhaps the elf in the water beckons from the world of the cherished child; Pearl is called lots of names in the novel such as: freak, sprite, elf-child, witch-baby, and demon offspring; she is the antithesis of the normal cherished child. In fact her behavior aligns her with some of the wild children who, removed from friends (and sometimes family) turn into beastlike

¹⁶⁰ Barbara Garlitz, “Pearl: 1850-1955,” *PMLA* 72. 4 (1957): 694. “Pearl’s image, ‘more refined and spiritualized than the reality,’ represents the better part of her nature, for, after contemplating it, she assumes ‘a singular air of authority,’ that is, her mission of retribution, and forces Hester to reassume the scarlet letter” (694).

others. Burnet researched a boy named Clemens who was a wild child and had trouble speaking. The only question he could easily answer when asked is where he came from. He stated: "...from the other side of the water" (22).¹⁶¹ He was placed in an asylum because of his penchant for wild animals; for Clemens too, the other side of the water seems to have offered acceptance and camaraderie, such as Pearl seeks in Hawthorne's novel.

In chapter two Hawthorne compares Hester and Pearl to the Madonna and child—but only as a reversed, subverted mirror image: "Here, there was the taint of deepest sin in the most sacred quality of human life, working such effect that the world was only the darker for this woman's beauty, and the more lost of the infant that she had borne" (53). At the beginning of the novel Hawthorne marries dark and light imagery. The depiction is clear by contrasting Hester and Pearl with the Madonna and savior. When the reader is presented with Pearl, the readers are told that the world is a darker place because of *this* child's birth. Often freaks are seen as the outward display of that which should be hidden as the narrator tells us: "The scene was not without a mixture of awe, such as must always invest the spectacle of guilt and shame in a fellow-creature" (53). Kochanek tells us, "Medicine, like sideshow barkers, brought deformity into view, substituting its own narratives for those of less methodical, less scrupulous and less forthright presenters of the same spectacles..." (240). The Puritans were obsessed with exposing secret sin, and Hester's sin is secret. She gets caught because she becomes pregnant, and her body is used to narrate the immorality of sinning; she embodies the Puritan belief that all secret sin will be exposed and her body illustrates that narrative through her pregnancy and her donning the scarlet letter. Throughout the three humiliating hours Hester performs on the scaffold and the town stares at the sinner and her child, the stage is set for this freak child to be viewed as a moral

¹⁶¹ Tylor Burnet, "Wild Men and Beast-Children," *Anthropological Review* 1.1 (1863): 21-32.

other. As Young states: “The ‘low-Other’ consistently takes certain forms, such as the grotesque and the carnivalesque, that threaten dominant culture not simply by inverting its norms, but also by enacting its internal fantasies” (33). Pearl is the result of a broken law, and this demon offspring is certainly threatening to the mainstream community. The novel is published during a time when masturbation was thought to be a morally contagious form of sinning, how “catching” was the immorality of adultery in antebellum America not to mention the Puritan epoch? Hester knows that if the truth were to be told, there would be scarlet letters all over town: “...if truth were everywhere to be shown, a scarlet letter would blaze forth on many a bosom besides Hester Prynne’s” (80), so she is guilty of exposing the community’s fantasies. Hester has threatened the Puritan culture not just by becoming pregnant when her husband is absent, but she is especially threatening because she refuses to reveal the child’s father, therefore protecting a secret sinner among them. Pearl, the freak child is threatening because she is the embodiment of a secret sinner in their midst. It could be anyone; it could be everyone. When the Reverend Dimmesdale asks Hester to name her fellow sinner, Pearl listens to his plea and holds up her hands: “Even the poor baby, at Hester’s bosom, was affected...for it directed its hitherto vacant gaze towards Mr. Dimmesdale, and held up its little arms, with a half-pleased, half plaintive murmur” (63). Hester does not expose Dimmesdale to public shame; however, the precocious freak harkens to her father’s voice the first time she hears it.

Pearl existence is inexorably intertwined with Hester’s sin. Pearl is Hester’s sin. Interestingly, in terms of oxymoronic characters, Hester embodies the whore Madonna motif in the novel. “Such narratives typically proceed as tales of seduction (often initiated in the

confessional) of a girl by a lecherous priest.”¹⁶² This, we presume, is what happens in the text since the novel opens after the seduction occurs. Hester is a member of the community awaiting her husband’s arrival and the minister, who is in a powerful position of authority in this theocracy, takes advantage of the lonely young woman. Hester is a willing participant in the affair, as is made clear when she recounts what she and Dimmesdale said to each other in the forest on that fateful occasion: “What we did had a consecration of its own. We felt it so! We said so to each other” (179). Although she was a willing participant, there is no question that Dimmesdale is powerful and with a word from him Hester could have been put to death for her crime. Fessenden explains that in the nineteenth century certain states classified any woman who had sex outside of marriage as a prostitute.¹⁶³ There was also a fascination with Catholic nuns and their varying states of enclosure in terms of sects and their requisite cloistered states, as Fessenden tells us. In *The Scarlet Letter* Hester is a scarlet woman who performs a nun’s duty when she aids the sick and helps the poor: “It was none the less a fact, however, that in the eyes of the very men who spoke thus, the scarlet letter had the effect of the cross on a nun’s bosom” (149). On these missions of mercy, Pearl accompanies her mother. The narrator also states of Hester that “She was self-ordained a Sister of Mercy” (148), which substantiates this simultaneous scarlet woman as Madonna paradox. The fascination with nuns, the interest in convent escape tales, and stories of nuns seduced by lecherous priests intrigued readers with such enticing titles as: *Secrets of Nunneries Disclosed*, *The Veil Lifted*, *Convent Life Exposed* and *Awful Disclosures*. One could argue once again that Hawthorne is so intimately in tune with his

¹⁶² Tracy Fessenden, “The Convent, the Brothel, and the Protestant Woman’s Sphere,” *Signs* 25.2 (2000): 451-478. “The figures of prostitute and nun were ripe for investment with nineteenth-century Protestant anxieties because of their shared liminality within American social space” (459).

¹⁶³ Tracy Fessenden, “The Convent, The Brothel, and the Protestant Woman’s Sphere,” *Signs* 25.2 (2000): 451-478. “Other states’ laws charged with ‘open and gross lewdness’ both women who had sex for money and women who had sex outside of marriage” (460).

time that he utilizes sensational elements in his novel to entice readers to his text. Hester is a woman seduced by a reverend rake, and the child of their unholy union is worthy to be staged as an interesting “What is it?”¹⁶⁴ specimen in a freak show. Hawthorne and P.T. Barnum have much in common as far as successfully utilizing marketing skills necessary to lure audiences to their respective domains. Barnum presented a play of Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple* in his American Museum that was mistaken for a religious service by a woman attending the event. “But as the gong sounded the show’s commencement, she asked, ‘Are the services about to commence?’ ‘Yes,’ Barnum answered, ‘The congregation is now going up’” (*Struggles* qtd. in Barnes 154-5). The woman confused Barnum’s staging of a perceived morality play with a church service wherein a minister preaches a didactic sermon. As Cook explains in *The Colossal P.T. Barnum Reader*: “The most successful puffs crystalize a public’s collective, inchoate desires. In some cases, they even bring a public into being” (104). Barnum lures a church going public to his moral play presented at his American Museum. Hawthorne entices a public exposed to city mysteries and salacious newspaper stories to his text, and allows this public to enjoy oxymoronic types such as the reverend rake in Dimmesdale, the prostitute nun in Hester, and the freakish savior in Pearl. Hawthorne sees what appeals to the readers and brings them into his text. As Andronik explains: “Exotic things, Barnum was discovering, attracted bigger crowds” (22). Hawthorne was discovering that same thing, as he includes clearly exotic characters in his novel like Hester: “She had in her nature a rich, voluptuous, Oriental characteristic—a taste for the gorgeously beautiful. . .” (77). Dimmesdale is described in the novel as “. . . a person of very striking aspect. . . a being who felt himself quite astray and at a loss in the pathway of human existence. . .” (62), and the hunchback Chillingworth is

¹⁶⁴ Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (Chicago: U Chicago Press, 1988) 134.

characterized as a deformed old demon, “So Roger Chillingworth—a deformed old figure with a face that haunted men’s memories longer than they liked. . . (160). The adult misfits and the freak child entertain readers. What could be more exotic and alluring in a Puritan novel than a large scale (giant) scarlet woman, outsider men, and a freak child whom the community believes is the devil’s spawn. Hawthorne peoples his novel with “exotic” curiosities.

The red letter is the focal point in Hawthorne’s novel, and Hester at one point says that Pearl is the scarlet letter as though the freak child exists only as a personified red alphabet letter: “Pearl punishes me, too! See ye not, she is the scarlet letter, only capable of being loved, and so endowed with a million fold the power of retribution for my sin.” Pearl is the red letter “A,” and Crain in “Spectacle of the Child” discusses how children in the nineteenth century were often surrounded by larger than life alphabet letters to encourage reading: “The jacket image [of Cross’s book] strikingly recalls images from mid-nineteenth-century children’s books, which consciously promoted the virtues of literacy by representing children surrounded by larger-than-life alphabet letters” (548). Here, at Pearl’s introduction into society, she is confronted with and surrounded by Hester’s larger than life red “A.” Pearl will take the next seven years to read the meaning of Hester’s scarlet letter and penetrate the mystery surrounding it as no one else in the novel has as intimate a connection to the letter as she does. Hawthorne in the Custom House introduction tells us that he first discovered the large “A” and then found the foolscap with Surveyor Pue’s description of Mistress Prynne’s life: “The rag of scarlet cloth,--for time and wear and a sacrilegious moth had reduced it to little other than a rag,--on careful examination, assumed the shape of a letter. It was the capital letter A” (30), a large red alphabet letter for the reader to focus on for the rest of the novel and Pearl is that symbolic “A.” As Ragussis explains in “Family Discourse and Fiction in The Scarlet Letter,” when Hester lies to Pearl about why she

wears the scarlet letter and states that she wears it only for the beautiful gold thread, “The lie about the letter is so serious because it breaks the sacred bond through which the mother teaches the child the alphabet that articulates her identity and her place in the human community . . . Hester’s refusal to inform the child of the letter’s greater . . . significance makes the child fail her examination in the simplest of categories, the ABC’s of who she is” (868). Pearl is the freak synecdoche; and her status as other comes from her fractured self, which can never be truly separated from Hester’s scarlet letter. “The fatherless and lawless child appropriately provides her own genealogy according to no law we can understand, as if she were a freak of nature, either engendered by one parent alone or plucked from a rose bush” (Ragussis 866). Pearl also tests the community’s tolerance. The Puritans came here for religious tolerance, and they are intolerant of any aberration in their members’ behavior. Hester’s “A,” of which Pearl is a living embodiment, tests the community. Melish in “The ‘Condition’ Debate and Racial Discourse in the Antebellum North,” discusses a free African-American caterer’s speech regarding the Negro and his place in this New World. George T. Downing says: “All of the great principles of the land are brought out and discussed in connection with the Negro . . . We are the alphabet; upon us, all are constructed” (qtd. in Melish 653). In antebellum America the African American, free or enslaved, is the alphabet upon which “all are constructed,” because of their outsider status. In Hawthorne’s antebellum text, Pearl represents the outsider through her association with the broken law the “A” represents. In the Puritan community, one can see that Pearl and how she navigates as a freakish outsider, is constructed by how the community reads her as the miniature scarlet “A.” She is the “alphabet upon whom all is constructed” in Hawthorne’s novel.

Pearl’s sounding of the scarlet letter is a healing journey of discovery, which enables her to gain self- knowledge; she does not simply torment Hester and Dimmesdale, as Chillingworth

does when he arrives on the scene. Pearl's desire is to expose sin so that it can be mended, for, as Hawthorne tells us, the world's heart is much more forgiving than Chillingworth's is: "All that guilty sorrow, hidden from the world, whose great heart would have pitied and forgiven, to be revealed to him, the Pitiless, to him, the Unforgiving" (128). Chillingworth is unforgiving, but Pearl and the community will pity and forgive. And so the comparison Hawthorne makes with the Madonna and child contrasts purity and sinfulness. Hester is a fallen woman whereas the Madonna is a virgin mother; the Christ child is pure and has come to save the world, yet interestingly Pearl who is presented as a lowly freak and the product of a sinful act, also performs a savior's role in the novel. Pearl, the demonic child, is instrumental in saving the main characters in the novel, just as angelic children in popular sentimental novels were instrumental in saving adults' souls, as little Eva does in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Hester similarly performs a healing role in that she helps the sick and needy; so Hawthorne's characters are deep and need to be sounded as they contain double sides: demonic savior in Pearl and the scarlet nun in Hester. Although tainted, they are still powerful and capable of heroic feats. Pearl saves her mother and father.

Pearl's freak status is preserved by her separation from the community; she and her mother live apart from the townspeople on the threshold of the forest. "On the outskirts of the town, within the verge of the peninsula, but not in close vicinity to any other habitation, there was a small thatched cottage...Hester established herself, with her infant child. A mystic shadow of suspicion immediately attached itself to the spot" (74-5). The woman who has lost her way, and the child whose birth darkens the world are *not* taken into the heart of the community so that the mother's transgression can be healed—the lost pair remains on the fringe of society and since the first scaffold scene, they are a sideshow event to be viewed from afar.

Their geographic separation is also a moral separation.¹⁶⁵ David Wall states: "...we again see the dominant tropes of the carnivalesque—deformity, disproportion, oaths and obscenity, and mocking laughter—invoked in order to situate the unruly lower orders irredeemably beyond the margins of civilized life" (524). Hester and Pearl reside beyond 'civilized life' but not *in* the forest; they can be watched--albeit from a distance and at arm's length--by the community. They are both frequently mocked and ridiculed by the Puritan children and others; the scarlet letter family performs the freakish underside of the respectable Puritan community.

Pearl has no friends in the community. Puritan children do creep to their cottage not to play, but to stare at Hester and Pearl as they would freaks in a sideshow. Although Pearl's beauty is faultless and she is "...worthy to have been brought forth in Eden; worthy to have been left there, to be the plaything of the angels, after the world's first parents were driven out" (82), Pearl "...could not be made amenable to rules" (83), and she is a handful for Hester to understand and discipline. Hester sometimes questions Pearl's humanity, since a great rule was broken at her conception she believes the elements of the child's nature are monstrously disordered. This is a motif running throughout Chillingworth's analysis of Dimmesdale also. He notices that there is an intimate connection between the sickness of the minister's soul and his physical decline. Chillingworth comments: "A rare case!" he muttered. 'I must needs look deeper into it. A strange sympathy betwixt soul and body!'" (126). Just so, there is this strange sympathy between Pearl's soul and body. Because of the great law broken to give her life, she is described as a ghoulish, freakish out of sorts type of spirit. Hester describes a weird look that takes over Pearl: "It was a look so intelligent, yet inexplicable, so perverse, sometimes so

¹⁶⁵ Christine Ferguson, "Gooble-Gabble, One Of Us": Grottesque Rhetoric and the Victorian Freak Show." Victorian Review published by Victorian Studies Association of Western Canada 23.2 (1997) 244-250.

"By exoticizing their bodily differences, side-show performers were able to capitalize on the public's need to see bars of culture, race, and geography between the physical deviant and their own idyllic homestead" (245-246).

malicious, but generally accompanied by a wild flow of spirits, that Hester could not help questioning, at such moments, whether Pearl were a human child” (84). Hester believes at such times that Pearl is a witch or certainly bewitched as she says of Pearl: “She seemed rather an airy sprite, which, after playing its fantastic sports for a little while. . . would flit away with a mocking smile” (84). Hester also describes Pearl as an other worldly being over whom she can exercise no power: “Brooding over all these matters, the mother felt like one who has evoked a spirit, but, by some irregularity in the process of conjuration, has failed to win the master-word that should control this new incomprehensible intelligence” (85). Since Pearl is always left to herself, she seems to simultaneously cohabit this world and the nether world. As the narrator explains: “Pearl was a born outcast of the infantile world. An imp of evil, emblem and product of sin, she had no right among christened infants” (85-6). Since there is always an “inviolable circle round about her” Pearl freakishness is congenital. In fact Pearl is perceived as an *other* prenatally—before she is even born. Once she is born, Hester heightens Pearl’s freak status by costuming her in outfits which enhance her freak status.

The narrator variously describes Pearl as an elf, as being under a spell, and as a conjured spirit. All these things lead the reader to see that she is a freak; even the costumes in which Hester attires Pearl call attention to the fact that she is the scarlet letter itself: “Her mother, in contriving the child’s garb, had allowed the gorgeous tendencies of her imagination their full play; arraying her in a crimson velvet tunic, of a peculiar cut, abundantly embroidered with fantasies and flourishes of gold thread” (93). Hester is constantly reminded of her sin when she looks at Pearl and consciously dresses the child as a miniature scarlet letter. Hester, at Pearl’s request, views herself in the breastplate armor, at Governor Bellingham’s, which serves as a

mirror and the scarlet letter is gigantic—she is eclipsed by her giant *A*¹⁶⁶. Similarly, when she is displayed on the scaffold head and shoulders above the crowd, she certainly can be viewed as a giant. Hawthorne’s narrator describes Hester: “The young woman was tall, with a figure of perfect elegance on a large scale” (50). Stewart in *On Longing* explains a function of the giant: “On the other hand, the gigantic continues its secular life in the submerged world of the carnival grotesque; its celebrations of licentiousness and lived bodily reality are truly the underbelly of official life” (81). Hester is described as being a “large scale woman” and she does not believe what she and Dimmesdale did was a sin. Her giantessness is emblematic of her licentiousness, in the Hawthorne’s eyes, and Pearl is a product of that affair. Hester and Pearl journey through their lives as members of the “underbelly” of Puritan society, whereas Dimmesdale remains untarnished by his clandestine association with the freak child and her scarlet mother.

Pearl’s separate status from the adult community and even from other children is because of her identification as a miniature scarlet letter. Hester is the giant “A” and Pearl is the miniature “A” and the two are inextricable in the novel. In *On Longing*, Stewart explains the miniature:

The child continually enters here as a metaphor, perhaps not simply because the child is in some physical sense a miniature of the adult, but also because the world of childhood, limited in physical scope yet fantastic in its content, presents in some ways a miniature and fictive chapter in each life history; it is a world that is part of history, at least the history of the individual subject, but remote from the presentness of adult life. We imagine childhood as if it were at the other end of a tunnel—distanced, diminutive, and

¹⁶⁶ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, “. . . the scarlet letter was represented in exaggerated and gigantic proportions, so as to be greatly the most prominent feature of her appearance. In truth, she seemed absolutely hidden behind it” (97).

clearly framed. From the fifteenth century on, miniature books were mainly books for children, and in the development of children's literature the depiction of the miniature is a recurring device. (44)

In *The Scarlet Letter* the depiction of Pearl as miniature scarlet letter is also "a recurring device." The freak child, Pearl, is remote from the "presentness of adult life" in the Puritan community as she lives on the fringes of the ordinary community and is viewed as sub-normal; certainly she is "distanced, diminutive and clearly framed" as a freak child. The only adults with whom she comfortably converses are Mistress Hibbins the witch-lady and the pirates who recognize a kindred spirit in the little freak. Pearl is literally the diminutive novel *The Scarlet Letter*, wherein the story is metaphorically written. Her body is the little book, which encapsulates the cautionary tale of what *not* to do.

In this context Hester can be viewed as a giant and Pearl as the midget. So, it is impossible for the townspeople ever to view Pearl separately from the way they view her mother; she is her sinful mother's sin. Hester tells the Puritan ministers when they are debating removing Pearl from her care: "...she is the scarlet letter..." (104). When Pearl is three months old in her mother's arms on the scaffold, and when the freak child is ornately garbed by her mother, she is a beautifully illuminated miniature book. Her body is used to decipher mysteries. "Pearl, as the first initial of some hidden word or name, is an abbreviated form of her father. . . Finally, Pearl is a living hieroglyphic or abbreviation because she is made out of her parents' linguistic half-truths and deceptions" (Ragussis 869). Dimmesdale is afraid his identity will be revealed through Pearl's miniature form. The couple hide their sin until Pearl's body prompts the revelation of the deception. Pearl's freakishness is made clear as she is viewed as a walking red letter "A." Although Hester and Dimmesdale attempt to keep their secret, they cannot control Pearl. "For

the child, despite all the methods of parental and societal control exerted on it, represents an alien other to be feared” (Ragussis 871). The ministers refer to the freak child as something vain. Governor Bellingham wants to know how the apparition got into his house and he states: “There used to be a swarm of these small apparitions, in holiday time; and we called them children of the Lord of Misrule” (100), and frequently in the novel, Pearl breaks the rules. “In giving her existence, a great law had been broken. . .” (83) and therefore “The child could not be made amenable to rules” (83). She shows no respect for authority and dances on graves.

In terms of the miniature body wherein mysteries are revealed, Pearl is not unlike Joice Heth who was exhibited by Barnum in 1835. Barnum includes newspaper articles in his entries regarding Joice Heth. The *New York Sun* states of Heth: “Her weight is said to be less than fifty pounds. Her feet have shrunk to mere skin and bone, and her long attenuated fingers more resemble the claws of a bird of prey than human appendages” (Cook 107-8). Heth was presented as General George Washington’s 161 year old nurse, who raised the father of our country and with her too, there is a strange connection between soul and body. She is the body, which connects the country with its past hero; she is the slave body that symbolizes the present race issues. Many people who came to see Heth really came to marvel at the spectacle of her aged body, and Barnum’s broadside announcement described her as “this living skeleton.”¹⁶⁷ The public could not get enough of skeleton woman. “Her debility was a draw, too, for many came to gaze on—even to touch—her marvelously decrepit body” (80).¹⁶⁸ Barnum broadside touted her: “Joice Heth is unquestionably the most astonishing and interesting curiosity in the World! She is the slave of Augustine Washington...and was the first person who put clothes on the

¹⁶⁷ Joice Heth, “Great Attraction Just Arrived at Concern Hall. For A Short Time Only. Joice Heth, Nurse to Gen. George Washington” Boston: 1835 1 sheet ([2] p.); 23 x 17 cm. *American Broadsides and Ephemera*, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA.

¹⁶⁸ Benjamin Reiss, “P.T. Barnum, Joice Heth and Antebellum Spectacles of Race” *American Quarterly* 51.1 (1999):78-107.

unconscious infant who in after days led our heroic fathers on to glory, to victory and freedom.” In a similar way the Reverend Mr. Wilson in Hawthorne’s novel is astonished by the vision of Pearl—she is clearly a wondrous apparition in the new world. He says of Pearl: “Prithee, young one, who art thou, and what has ailed they mother to bedizen thee in this strange fashion? Art thou a Christian child,—ha? Dost know thy catechism? Or art thou one of those naughty elfs or fairies whom we thought to have left behind us, with other relics of Papistry, in merry old England?” (100-101). Pearl, too, is a freakish sight to behold in the ascetic Puritan community, a connection to a more decadent, ornate, papist, old world past. Just so Heth provides a connection to the founding father, albeit a slave’s connection to the heroic George Washington. Hawthorne is influenced by Barnum’s first successful staging of an old curiosity, and learns from the Heth exhibition to similarly stage Hester and Pearl.

As if Heth’s otherness were not exotic enough, the same Barnum broadside announcement exclaims: “Joice Heth was born on the island of Madagascar, on the Coast of Africa, in the year 1674 and has consequently now arrived at the astonishing AGE OF 161 YEARS!” Barnum stages her as a skeleton woman, an ethnic other from an exotic locale, and an aged freak. Barnum describes Heth as a “living monument of antiquity” (Cook 107), and it is through Heth’s body that the present slavery issue can be pondered, and the heroic past of the country discovered; her body is an important key to unlocking mysteries. Barnum later admits that the whole thing was a hoax and in the 1860s characterizes the Joice Heth event as “the least deserving of all my efforts.”¹⁶⁹ But when it was expedient for him, Barnum made money off this aged woman. In his writing about staging Joice Heth, he admits pulling her teeth to ensure that she looked older, bribing her with whiskey and inserting publicity information in various

¹⁶⁹ Phineas T. Barnum, *The Colossal P.T. Barnum Reader: Nothing Else Like It In The Universe*, ed. James W. Cook (Urbana: U Chicago Press, 2005) 3.

newspapers to guarantee large audiences. He sometimes called her his “black beauty” because she was such a lucrative asset. He was a successful, wealthy businessman when he looked back on this event as something unworthy of his talents. Heth’s freak status, as she was sold to the public as an “. . . animated mummy” (Cook 107), mirrors Pearl’s freak status though one is old and one very young. Everyone looks to Pearl’s face and body to unravel the mystery of the anonymous secret sinner—Hester’s partner. Heth is the mummy and Pearl is the demon; their bodies are analyzed to enable spectators to decode enigmas. Just as Barnum pulled Heth’s teeth to present her as an other, Hester “bedizens” Pearl so that she cannot seamlessly assimilate into the Puritan community. Pearl is costumed as an other—a walking emblem of her mother’s scarlet letter.

As large audiences examine Joice Heth, similarly the Puritan townspeople study Pearl because of her mysterious paternity and the spectacle her fallen mother’s narrative affords them. Pearl is the beautiful freak, the product of a broken sacred law and people inspect her, as Chillingworth does, in an attempt to discover her father’s identity in her features—to read her body. The leech says of Pearl: “Would it be beyond a philosopher’s research, think ye, gentlemen, to analyze that child’s nature, and, from its make and mould, to give a shrewd guess at the father?” (107). Others believe she is the child of Hester and the Black Man who lives in the forest. Mistress Hibbins says to Pearl: “They say, child, thou art of the lineage of the Prince of Air! Wilt thou ride with me some fine night to see thy father?” (221). Even at the end of the novel just before the revelation, the seaman calls Pearl “witch-baby” and she replies: “If thou callest me that ill-name, I shall tell him [Black Man] of thee, and he will chase thy ship with a tempest!” (224). The beautiful witch child has powers to chase a ship with a storm similar to the witches in *Macbeth*; although Pearl is a child, her powers are clearly discernible as the pirate just

arrived in town can pick Pearl out from the crowd. Pearl's powers are of a darker hue. Pearl is described as frightening her enemies and dispersing them with her shouts and angry gestures: "She resembled, in her fierce pursuit of them, an infant pestilence,--the scarlet fever, or some such half-fledged angel of judgment,--whose mission was to punish the sins of the rising generation" (94). And Pearl does judge her parents and the community. Similarly, Joice Heth was a symbolic judge of current times. Her supernatural power was to outlive any other American. Barnum used her aged condition and her supposed connection to George Washington to elicit contributions to free her descendants who were still enslaved in Kentucky (*The Colossal P.T. Barnum Reader* 36). So her body provided a timeline that reached from the days of the revolution to the antebellum times when another decisive American war was smoldering.

The antebellum audience reveled in Joice Heth's exhibit and after her death paid to view the spectacle of her autopsy to see if doctors could really validate that she was 161 years old—they came to read what her body could tell them. The real question antebellum audiences wanted answered about Joice Heth was the answer to her identity. They wanted to know who she truly was. The connection between body and soul is applicable here too. What is the connection between Heth's aged body and her soul? She lives during the nineteenth century but was alive when the Declaration of Independence was penned. Is she entitled to the freedom it promises? Does she have a soul like the white audience who comes to view her? Reiss states of Heth: "The intensified focus on fixing her identity (which had always been a thread in reactions to her live exhibit), rather than interpreting her story, takes on an implicitly deterministic overtone when viewed within the context of scientific attempts to essentialize race in the antebellum period" (79). The townspeople in *The Scarlet Letter* likewise look to fix Pearl's identity and essentialize who she is, what she is, and where she came from; the community looks

to see if she is the mark of the devil on the town. The townspeople are interested in the moral miscegenation presented by the rumored union of Hester and the demonic Black Man who inhabits the forest—Pearl is said by some to be the product of that union and “Hawthorne believed in the physiological inheritance of moral character.”¹⁷⁰ It is no surprise then, when Pearl is discovered to be Dimmesdale’s child, that she leaves the community to start anew elsewhere. How could she ever be respected where she was so reviled? As David Wall explains: “In the symbolic realm of bourgeois consciousness, carnivalesque images of the distorted and exaggerated grotesque body always appear as the terrifying racial and social Other to the classical self-containment of the bourgeois body” (526-7). Joice Heth is clearly the racial other who offers intimate connections to the revered first president through her body; and Pearl is the town’s moral other, the child of the scarlet woman and the product of miscegenation who easily fits the definition of a cultural outsider. Both Pearl and Heth are displayed to their respective communities as freaks who can offer a window through which a mystery can be elucidated. Heth’s body offers a connection to America’s beginnings and our founding father; Pearl’s body offers a possible resolution to her mysterious paternity. With Joice Heth as a mother figure to George Washington, and with Pearl believed to be the child of the Black Man the race barrier is permeated. “Black culture held a special fascination for white working-class Americans in the nineteenth century, according to Eric Lott, who calls the minstrel show ‘a manifestation of the particular desire to try on the accents of ‘blackness’ that demonstrates ‘the permeability of the color line.’”¹⁷¹ In strongly suggesting that Pearl’s father is the Black Man who inhabits the forest, Hawthorne tests the “permeability of the color line” in seventeenth century Boston with nineteenth century Salem sensitivities. In chapter sixteen “A Forest Walk,” Hester answers the

¹⁷⁰ Garlitz 689-699.

¹⁷¹ Carl Ostrowski, “Slavery, Labor Relations and Intertextuality in Antebellum Print Culture: The Slave Narrative and the City Mysteries Novels,” *African American Review* 40.3 (2006): 493-506.

community's suspicions when she tells Pearl: "'Once in my life I met the Black Man!' said her mother. 'This scarlet letter is his mark!'" (170).

The term freak is used seven times in the novel and five of those references involve Pearl.¹⁷² The Puritan children are described as "...scaring one another with freaks of imitative witchcraft" (86). But it is Pearl who is described as practicing witchcraft: "The unlikeliest materials—a stick, a bunch of rags, a flower—were the puppets, of Pearl's witchcraft. . ." (87). Her eyes are described as having a cast as if she were possessed: "Once, this freakish, elfish cast came into the child's eyes. . ." (89). Pearl is also described as possibly having the power to fly: "...Pearl laughed, and began to dance up and down, with the humorsome gesticulation of a little imp, whose next freak might be to fly up the chimney" (90). She is described as behaving freakishly when her heavenly father is discussed: "Whether moved only by her ordinary freakishness, or because an evil spirit prompted her, she put up her small forefinger, and touched the scarlet letter" (90). Immediately thereafter she insists that she has no heavenly father. Pearl also acts freaky when she is in the forest and Hester calls her to meet Dimmesdale: "But, whether influenced by the jealousy that seems instinctive with every petted child towards a dangerous rival, or from whatever caprice of her freakish nature, Pearl would show no favour to the clergyman" (194). Hawthorne associates the word freak with Pearl.

Pearl is the freakish outsider whose presence excites conversations about the scarlet letter and the identity of her father who lives in the community and shares Hester's red letter unbeknownst to anyone but Hester. Joice Heth represents a similar permutable experience as her body straddles antebellum America with its racial tensions on one side, and on the other side, her body simultaneously provides an unbroken connection to the founding father and the glory days

¹⁷² Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (Amazon A Public Domain Book) 92, 95, 96, 228, 236, 249.

of the country's birth. Pearl and Joice Heth both fit comfortably into Leslie Fiedler's definition of Freaks: "The true Freak, however, stirs both supernatural terror and natural sympathy, since, unlike the fabulous monsters, he is one of us, the human child of human parents, however altered by forces we do not quite understand into something mythic and mysterious, as no mere cripple ever is" (*Freaks* 24). Certainly Pearl's mysterious paternity and her description as a "demon child" stir "supernatural terror" in the Puritan community. She is clearly just a child in the novel. Joice Heth's age at 161 years old renders her "no mere cripple" but stirs "supernatural terror and natural sympathy" as a human who had lived longer than any other human excepting Methuselah, and Heth aroused natural sympathy as she cradled George Washington in her ancient arms.

The Puritan time period had an impact on shaping American thought before America was a free and united country; the founding fathers and their declaration of freedom is another monumental event shaping this country. Pearl is part of the Puritan event although Hawthorne wrote the novel during the nineteenth century. Joice Heth's body is believed to occupy two important historical time periods. Her body lived at the beginning of our independence war and then, through her slave body, she was an emblem of the great new war on the horizon, the Civil War. In the turmoil that was the rapid urbanization of mid-nineteenth century America, its masses were instructed with the readily available penny newspapers and there was a sense that the country could actually be losing itself in the midst of so many voices from so many publications. Such explains the nostalgia for George Washington that the Joice Heth exhibit at Barnum's American Museum satisfied. "Such veneration [of Washington] served as a stabilizing force during a time of social upheaval. As the nation underwent its most rapid period of urbanization, widespread anxieties about loss of tradition surfaced in society and politics"

(Reiss 87). People wanted to hear about the founding father's life firsthand from his nurse and get back in touch with the root of the nation's beginning before it was lost. They wanted to cling to a monumental, defining time amidst all the change—to remember the glorious past before it disappeared. Hawthorne may have been caught up in this nostalgia and desire to cling to a more stable time period in terms of family and community when he wrote his novel. He reached farther back than the founding fathers for his morally austere community—the colonial Puritans. But the exhibit of Joice Heth and the scaffold scene wherein Hester and Pearl are exhibited share important similarities. Heth's body is touched, examined, simultaneously revered and repulsed; she is seen as a link to the most exalted member of the founding fathers, George Washington, and viewed as a freak whose connection to the founding father tarnishes or at the very least makes problematic his memory; Heth's ethnicity touches into the present because slavery is thriving and the Civil War is looming. Hester is a beautiful, young woman, yet through her affair and the birth of the “infant pestilence” Pearl, she is made an outcast and by extension, Pearl is made a freak. Hester has to wear the scarlet letter and she is seen as morally repulsive; she is even described as losing her womanhood. After years of wearing the scarlet letter, making clothes for the poor, tending the sick, and raising Pearl it is clear that Hester is changed:

Some attribute had departed from her, the permanence of which had been essential to keep her a woman. Such is frequently the fate, and such the stern development, of the feminine character and person, when the woman has encountered, and lived through, an experience of peculiar severity. If she be all tenderness, she will die. If she survive, the tenderness will either be crushed out of her, or—and the outward semblance is the same—crushed so deeply into her heart that it can never show itself more. (150)

There is always a circle around her into which the community will not venture. P.T. Barnum is known to have exhibited a bearded lady, that freak who elides male and female attributes; Hester becomes a walking asexual creature. Yet the narrator tells us: “She who had once been a woman, and ceased to be so, might at any moment become a woman again if there were only the magic touch to effect the transfiguration” (150). The magical touch is needed, just like Dimmesdale’s three kisses magically break Pearl’s spell. Once the spell of her dubious paternity is broken, the freak becomes normalized. Barnum casts a spell on Joice Heth and creates a fairy tale to meet the nostalgic needs of his community to re-experience the days of our founding fathers. Barnum creates the narrative of Joice Heth and coaches her to tell stories about baby George Washington to the hungry audiences who come to view her and hear, first hand about our first president.

Hawthorne’s simultaneous attraction and repulsion to nineteenth century voyeuristic penny newspapers propelled him to write a morally austere novel wherein the freak show motif is present, but the freak child, though she is redemptive cannot, once normalized, remain within the civilized community. In the end, her father is known to be a prominent minister, she is rich, but she is sent away. Pearl is like African slaves who were sent back to Africa because it was thought there was no suitable place for them here, due to the fact that international slave trade was illegal as of 1808. The passengers of the infamous *Echo* slave ship were sent back to Africa.¹⁷³ The slaves, like Pearl, were others who did not belong in antebellum America. Pearl, too, must leave this religious community and become an illustrious wife and mother *elsewhere*.

¹⁷³ “Fort Sumter & Slavery: the *Echo* Incident,” Fort Sumter National Monument. “In 1858 Fort Sumter became involved in one of the most notorious episodes in slave smuggling. On August 21 the U.S. Navy captured the slave ship *Echo* and brought it into Charleston Harbor. Of the 450 captives. . . 144 had already died. . . . On Constitutional grounds, President James Buchanan ordered the Africans transported home onboard the steamship *Niagara*. Even with medical care, only 196 of the original 450 captives were still alive by the time they reached Monrovia.”

Whereas the color of a slave's skin marked him or her as an outsider, (as did Joice Heth's), Pearl's moral otherness marks her as a freak. The product of immorality is not welcome to remain in the Puritan community. Reiss explains: "Freak shows...helped disseminate the lessons of racial solidarity because they acted as a hinge between scientific inquiries into racial essence and the popular desire for images of white domination."¹⁷⁴ Pearl's ostracism solidifies her as a moral freak, one that must be dominated by the righteous Puritan community. Race and perceived immorality are parallel issues, and reasons to be viewed as freakish others in antebellum America. "Rather, as the work of Diane Arbus personifies, 'freak' has become a metaphor for estrangement, alienation, marginality, the dark side of the human experience."¹⁷⁵ Hester's sin and the product of that sin, Pearl, are examples of "the dark side of human experience." Similarly, Joice Heth is marginalized because of her race and age; Pearl is estranged because of her connection to Hester. Joice Heth's experience: her staging, exhibition, and even her autopsy speak to a larger issue of national identity—who is a member of the national community with all the rights inherent therein, and who is an outsider? As Frost explains: "There was, then, no such thing as a 'real freak'; by virtue of their carefully plotted representation, freaks were/are always constructed" (6). Pearl and Heth are constructed freaks; their respective communities, antebellum America, mark them as outsiders.¹⁷⁶

Pearl is the child of the holiest reverend, yet she is ostracized because of his othering of her; she is an outsider because of her scarlet mother and she will never be accepted on equal footing in this Christian society. Joice Heth has an intimate connection (in the narrative Barnum provides her) to the father of our country, but her race and decrepit body simultaneously attract

¹⁷⁴ Reiss 84-85.

¹⁷⁵ Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (Chicago: U Chicago Press, 1988) 2.

¹⁷⁶ Linda Frost, *Never One Nation: Freaks, Savages, and Whiteness in U.S. Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota Press, 2005) 6.

viewers who want to touch a piece of the past and connect to our first president, and repulse viewers because of her race and age.¹⁷⁷ Pearl's age is also a negative lot cast against her; at her age she *should* know her catechism, but she does not. In the seventeenth century, the belief in ongoing revelations and the reading of the community to understand whether it was saved or damned is a spiritual identity issue. If one were to read Pearl to assess the community's standing, one would have to assume the community is damned. Who is her father? Why doesn't she know who made her? Why is she so wild? Similarly, reading Heth's body allows an identity seeking nineteenth century community to connect with the country's heroic beginnings during a race crisis before the Civil War. A nation attempting to identify itself touches back to the first president's nursemaid for its narrative and is presented with a mirror of society and an echo of its defining words: all men are created equal. The connection here to our past is the first president's slave. The key to understanding George Washington is through his slave's body. "...Heth's story provides a salient marker for the centrality of the freak show to the national culture" (189).¹⁷⁸ The freaks are not the sideshow, but the main event wherein the cultural clashes of nineteenth century can be read through the bodies of its citizens.

Religious beliefs or lack thereof can be a reason for a community to construct a narrative of freakishness. Pearl is described as having witchcraft in her and although her mother teaches her about God, the child insists that she was not born but plucked from a rose bush: "...the child finally answered that she had not been made at all, but had been plucked by her mother off the bush of wild roses that grew by the prison-door" (103). Pearl knows that she is expected to

¹⁷⁷ Phineas T. Barnum, *The Colossal P.T. Barnum Reader: Nothing Else Like It In the Universe* ed. James W. Cook (Urbana: U Illinois Press, 2005) 16-17. "... but I made her look a great deal older. I extracted her teeth, which caused her cheeks to sink in. . . I thought that the fame of such distinction would herald old Joyce above all negro wenches ever exhibited, and I was right. . ." (16-17).

¹⁷⁸ Eden Osucha, rev. of *The Showman And The Slave: Race, Death, And Memory In Barnum's America*, by Benjamin Reiss, *American Literature* 75.1 (2003): 187-189. *America: History & Life*. Web. 6 Nov. 2012.

honestly answer questions asked of her, but she performs as if she were an outrageous ethnographic freak.¹⁷⁹ It is worth noting that the last paragraph in chapter one “The Prison Door” ends with a discussion of the same rose bush to which Pearl refers. The narrator plucks one rose from the bush and offers it to the reader: “...we could hardly do otherwise than pluck one of its flowers, and present it to the reader. It may serve, let us hope, to symbolize some sweet moral blossom, that may be found along the track, or relieve the darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow” (46). That one rose presented to the reader symbolizes Pearl’s exhibition as a moral force of the novel; she is intimately intertwined with Hawthorne’s message: the thorny freak is redemptive.

As if to highlight her heathen aspect, not long after being asked about her heavenly father Pearl is seen dancing on graves in the cemetery: “She now skipped irreverently from one grave to another; until coming to the broad, flat, armorial tombstone of a departed worthy,--perhaps of Isaac Johnson himself,--she began to dance upon it” (123). Pearl behaves as impudently as possible as though she is performing her role as irreligious freak to shock the Puritan worthies. They believe the behavior of their members accurately reflects whether or not they are among the elect or the damned. Pearl makes it clear that should the Puritans look to her as a litmus test of their community’s salvation, they are surely damned. Although the young children in the town call Hester hurtful names, when Pearl touches her mother’s scarlet letter and throws “prickly burrs” at it, *her* behavior is more painful than the other children’s. Pearl’s behavior is a wake up call to Hester and the community. When Dimmesdale returns from his meeting with Hester in the forest towards the end of the novel, he is transformed. He wants to curse at

¹⁷⁹ Reiss, “P.T. Barnum, Joice Heth and Antebellum Spectacles of Race” *American Quarterly* 51.1 (1999):78-107. “The episode thus offers the opportunity to construct an ethnographic miniature of white antebellum Northerners as they struggled to make sense of the interlocking issues of racial identification and modernization, and looked for symbolic resolution to those struggles in popular culture and the emerging mass media” (79).

townspeople and teach the town's children inappropriate words. He is described as wanting to hobnob with the sailors from the *Main*. Pearl is frequently described as a freak in the novel, but in one scene Dimmesdale says of his desire to corrupt the Puritan children: "Denying himself this freak, as unworthy of his cloth..." (201), meaning that speaking "wicked words to a knot of little Puritan children" would not be a minister's calling. Yet, throughout the novel Dimmesdale has denied Pearl, this freak child, who needs her father to humanize her. He has denied her because she and Hester are "unworthy of his cloth." He only openly associates with the freak child moments before he expires or in the deepest part of the heathen forest where none of his parishioners can see him.

Within the novel it is obvious to the townspeople, as well as to the adult protagonists that Pearl's nature is fractured. She will perform as a freak until claimed by her biological father and until the spell under which she has been kept captive is broken. Dimmesdale's secret sin must be revealed for Pearl's spell to be broken. The narrator describes Pearl's behavior as "...ordinary freakishness..." (90), and this freakishness remains until Dimmesdale kisses her and magically breaks the demonic spell. Only then will her duty as freak be complete and only then she will no longer function as a kid show in the novel.

Pearl works to bring her mother and father together once again so that they can openly confess and teach the reader what happens when sins are kept hidden—nothing good. There is no real happiness in the novel for any of the main characters, except the freak child, Pearl. The main characters, Hester, Dimmesdale and Chillingworth suffer tormented lives because they are not honest: Hester does not tell her lover's name and until years have elapsed she does not tell Dimmesdale that Chillingworth is her husband; Dimmesdale does not confess to the community that he is Pearl's father; Chillingworth does not tell the townspeople that he is Master Prynne,

Hester's long lost husband returned after a sojourn with the Indians. Because of their duplicity, their lives are filled with anguish and unfulfilled dreams. Once the revelation takes place Dimmesdale dies, but before he does he acknowledges Pearl. Chillingworth with no one left to torture, dies shortly after Dimmesdale and leaves his vast fortune to Pearl. "At old Roger Chillingworth's decease, (which took place within the year)...he bequeathed a very considerable amount of property, both here and in England to little Pearl...So Pearl—the elf child—the demon offspring, as some people up to that epoch persisted in considering her—became the richest heiress of her day in the New World" (237). Chillingworth had told Hester that she suffered enough through wearing the scarlet letter; he caused Dimmesdale to suffer more because of his un-confessed sin. But Chillingworth enables Hester's child to inherit his wealth believing, perhaps, that the child had suffered enough in this community and his wealth would allow her to travel where she could be respected and not referred to as "demon offspring." Hester once asks Dimmesdale to leave the community with her to "Leave this wreck and ruin here where it hath happened. Meddle no more with it! Begin all anew!" (181). It is Pearl who leaves the wreck and ruin behind never to return to the place where all her misery happened; Chillingworth's fortune allows her this freedom to start anew.

Hester leaves the community for some time but returns at the end of the novel to become a source of sympathy and knowledge to other women: "It had been her habit, from an almost immemorial date, to go about the country as a kind of voluntary nurse, and doing what-ever miscellaneous good she might; taking upon herself, likewise, to give advice in all matters, especially those of the heart; by which means, as a person of such propensities inevitably must, she gained from many people the reverence due to an angel..." (31-32). Her scarlet letter becomes an illustrious badge once all is revealed and she is like a preacher offering healing

advice to suffering hearts around her; so the sinner becomes able and capable when all facets of her sin are revealed. And so Hester Prynne, unlike so many nineteenth century women and ministers, is able to achieve a room of her own. Douglas explains: “It was a sign of the new self-conscious sense of upward mobility on the part of literary middle-class women that they coveted the elite prerogatives of their ministers, whose domain in so many ways seemed, if conspicuously more elevated than their own, yet tantalizingly contiguous to it.”¹⁸⁰ Hester outlives Dimmesdale, inhabits his former domain, and tells her story to the townswomen for years after his death; she gets the last word; she ministers to the community long after the minister is gone and gets to tell her version of history.

It is only through Hester’s return at the end of the novel that the readers hear whispers of the former freak child, Pearl. Pearl is the catalyst for the main characters’ redemption, including her own; she leaves the community and is accepted in a foreign society as a member, a woman and mother in *another place* although the narrator tells us: “So Pearl...at a marriageable period of life, might have mingled her wild blood with the lineage of the devoutest Puritan among them all” (237). Hawthorne understandably does not allow this to happen during the course of his novel set in the seventeenth century; it is enough that we see what happened when Hester mingled with one of the devoutest Puritan ministers of them all. Hawthorne with his antebellum morals does not allow the freak Pearl to “mingle” with the Puritans to presumably create a hybrid species half freak and half Puritan.

No, Pearl leaves and goes to “...that unknown region...” (238), a foreign land and letters bearing armorial seals come to Hester; these seals are unknown to the English. “Letters came, with armorial seals upon them, though of bearings unknown to English heraldry” (238). As

¹⁸⁰ Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Anchor, 1977): 78. “And the home could sanction rather than limit traditionally undomestic activities” (78).

Ferguson explains of freaks: “If a side-show performer looked different, it was assumed that he or she (sometimes both at once) must be from an undefined and strictly non-British region of elsewhere” (245). And elsewhere is where Pearl is at the end of the novel; the freakish behavior cannot be forgotten in *this* community, yet she is accepted as royalty in a non-British region, and it is not hard to imagine that any non-British place in the seventeenth-century would be considered a wild and savage place. Barnum often enticed customers to his museum and shows through advertising that his freaks were from exotic locales, even when they were from right next door. Joice Heth is said to be from the exotic island of Madagascar; she is a seventeenth century woman who supposedly lived into the nineteenth century. It is not just Hawthorne who connects the seventeenth century with the nineteenth century—Barnum’s bark is that Heth lived from the seventeenth century up to the present. So the freak, Pearl, leaves the country, leaves British territory, and is accepted by a wilder region where her wild blood is viewed as a kindred spirit. It is worth pondering why Pearl has to leave whereas Hester returns and is accepted and even welcomed. Pearl’s wild, freakish behavior ends with Dimmesdale’s admission that he is her father, yet Hawthorne has her leave the community. Once viewed as a freakish goblin, it is hard to break that mold, but Judd’s Margaret is able to flourish even though she was once viewed as an Indian freak. We never see Pearl truly embrace religion in Hawthorne’s novel—she is always that impish sprite who laughs in the faces of the Puritan elders. In the nineteenth century the insecurity of American identity is well documented,¹⁸¹ and it is not surprising that Pearl, the

¹⁸¹ Linda Frost, *Never One Nation: Freaks, Savages, and Whiteness in U.S. Popular Culture 1850-1877*. Minneapolis: U Minnesota Press, 2005. “Capitalizing on the crisis of national identity spurred in part by the Civil War and recent events in Minnesota, Barnum’s work in his American Museum...helped to shore up a racially determined but historically threatened and regionally specific understanding of Americanness” (1-2).

other in the text, is summarily relegated to a land outside the borders of civilization, whereas Hester's adultery can be forgiven, Pearl's "pestilence—the scarlet fever"¹⁸² cannot.

Later, Hester is seen "...embroidering a baby-garment" and we know Pearl has her own life and family in a far off land, and remembers her mother lovingly with expensive gifts. Hester outlives the other adult characters and this may be because her adultery is known and she wears the scarlet letter willingly and openly. Another reason for her endurance may be that she had Pearl around to help her suffer and heal. Pearl has magical skills of discernment. As Alison Luri in *Don't Tell the Grownups* states: "As we had suspected, the fairy tales had been right all along . . . To succeed in this world you needed some special skill or patronage, plus remarkable luck; and it didn't hurt to be very good-looking" (18). Pearl's skill is that, even as an infant, she discerns who her father is. She is astute enough to really read the world. She is exceptionally beautiful and enclosed in a magical fairy tale wherein she is "...the scarlet letter running along . . ." (94), and simultaneously a character plucked from a rosebush who is sent to save her mother, father and the community at large. A walking red letter and a red rose are freakish attributes for a human child in this fairy tale wherein kisses break the freak's enchantment.

Pearl and Hester are inexorably intertwined in this novel as Hester's wears the scarlet letter and Pearl *is* the scarlet letter. "The mother herself—as if the red ignominy were so deeply scorched into her brain that all her conceptions assumed its form—had carefully wrought out the similitude; lavishing many hours of morbid ingenuity, to create an analogy between the object of her affection and the emblem of her guilt and torture. But, in truth, Pearl was the one, as well as the other. . ." (93). Hester's triumph in this dark fairy tale and her longevity are unusual.

¹⁸² Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, Toronto: Bantam, 1981. "She resembled, in her fierce pursuit of them, an infant pestilence—the scarlet fever, or some such half-fledged angel of judgment—whose mission was to punish the sins of the rising generation. She screamed and shouted, too, with a terrific volume of sound, which, doubtless, caused the hearts of the fugitives to quake within them" (94).

“Although the stories and morality of sexually-transgressive heroines vary widely, sex is generally fatal. In her survey of both penny fiction and middle-class novels, Sally Mitchell finds almost no female characters who survive sexual irregularity,”¹⁸³ yet Hester not only survives, but she returns to the community after many years, is accepted and attains the status of a prophetess and reformer. Hester would fit in with the characterization of other female reformers. “Rosen observes that the New York Female Benevolent Society ‘dedicated itself to assisting the ‘many sisters in the common tie of humanity, who are fallen,’ and that Lydia Maria Child ‘emphasized the similarities [between prostitutes and women reformers], each within a ‘hair’s breadth’ of being the other’” (Fessenden 467). Hester’s moral digression characterizes her as a prostitute and she returns as a reformer. “Familiar elements of our culture, language, class, authority, genre, are transformed through narrative, so that the ordinary becomes extraordinary (Natov, Lacoss 113).”¹⁸⁴ Perhaps with Hester Prynne the extraordinary freakishness becomes ordinary and she re-assimilates back into the community where she was once one of them, now that Pearl has left. Pearl could also be viewed as the product of moral miscegenation, as the product of the union between the most holy minister and the immoral scarlet woman. Such a morally mixed bloodline Hawthorne would not allow to thrive in antebellum America and Pearl would not be happy remaining in the community. How could she be happy there? As Leslie Fiedler in *Freaks* explains: “What children’s books tell us, finally, is that maturity involves the ability to believe the self normal, only the other a monster or Freak. Failing to attain such security, we are likely to end by not growing up at all . . .” (31). The community of Puritans never sees Pearl as a

¹⁸³ Ellen Bayuk Rosenman, “Spectacular Women: The Mysteries of London and the Female Body,” *Victorian Studies* 40.1 (1996): 31-64.

¹⁸⁴ Kate Behr, “‘Same-as-Difference’: Narrative Transformations and Intersecting Cultures in Harry Potter,” *Journal of Narrative Theory* 35:1 (2005): 112-132.

grown woman; and readers will always imagine Pearl as a child; and Pearl could never feel normal in a religious community where she was viewed as the devil's spawn.

As the freak stare is reflected back on society and tells us much about what society considers normal, so Pearl's position as a sideshow freak enables the reader to lucidly perceive Puritan society through the nineteenth century circus lens. Pearl is relegated to playing alone in the forest. Her connection to nature helps define her wildness and her freak status. She plays with weeds and adorns herself with a natural green "A." "...Pearl took some eel-grass, and imitated, as best as she could, on her own bosom, the decoration with which she was so familiar on her mother's" (163). She is one with nature and her separation from the hypocritical townspeople enables her to retain her purity of vision—she discerns what they cannot:

"According to L. Dhaleine, Pearl's insight into truth is the result of her enforced contact with nature which enables her to preserve her spotless soul from society's deleterious conventions and lies" (693).¹⁸⁵ In chapter nineteen when Hester and Dimmesdale meet in the forest, Hester tells him that Pearl has skill in terms of her dress and decoration with natural elements: "And see with what natural skill she has made those simple flowers adorn her! Had she gathered pearls, and diamonds, and rubies, in the wood, they could not have become her better" (188). The innocent, precocious child decorates herself with wild elements: "Pearl gathered the violets, and anemones, and columbines, and some twigs of the freshest green, which the old trees held down before her eyes. With these she decorated her hair, and her young waist, and became a nymph-child, or an infant dyrad, or whatever else was in closest sympathy with the antique wood" (188). She is an innocent child in the forest, though the forest in Puritan times was believed to be a lawless place: "Such was the sympathy of Nature—that wild, heathen Nature of the forest, never

¹⁸⁵ Barbara Garlitz, "Pearl: 1850-1955," *PMLA* 72. 4 (1957): 689-699. "Corrupt society is taken in by Dimmesdale, but Pearl, the child of nature, sees through his dissimulation" (693).

subjugated by human law, nor illumined by higher truth . . .” (186). So the freak Pearl is innocent in a lawless place; it is the same lawless forest where Hester and Dimmesdale sinned.

Pearl’s innocence in the forest is intimately connected to the fact that she is a child. Nunes explains, “In America, a nation statistically composed of more younger people than any other Western nation, the idea of the child as inherently good and capable of growth had particular appeal” (“The Naughty Child in Nineteenth-Century American Art” 227). Pearl is innocent in a lawless place “ . . . never subjugated by human law” (186), and even though she has been described as being demon offspring, the notion of the child as innocent is deep in the nineteenth-century psyche. As Garlitz explains, “For the idea of the heaven of infancy can be blended with one of the most progressive impulses of the nineteenth century—its egalitarianism” (“The Immortality Ode” 648). In typical oxymoronic mode, Hawthorne describes the heavenly demonic child as an innocent in the devilishly heathen forest. However, George Thompson in *Catharine and Clara* portrays a wild, fallen woman disposed of by her lover, Cyrus, as a lost soul who roams the forest with wreaths of flowers adorning her person: “Her raiment was tattered, and carelessly put on; no shoes protected her feet; and the only shelter for her head was a fantastic wreath, formed of flowers and leaves” (9). Pearl’s innocence is *preserved* because she is a child, but Hester’s presence in the forest is cause for alarm, as is Cyrus’s mistress’ presence there. The “wreaths of flowers adorning *her* person” make it clear that she is a fallen, lost, scarlet woman, as is Hester.

Pearl is not lost in the lawless forest, but at home. Leslie Fiedler speaks of the “Myth of the Stranger” in his study of freaks. Pearl is so comfortable in the forest among wild animals, so one with “wild, heathen Nature,” that she is viewed as a stranger in the Puritan community and accepted as family in the forest. Fielder states: “In this study, I found that the archetypal outsider

was figured not by the woman, the homosexual, the Jew, the Red Man, and the Black, as it often has been in classic American literature. Instead, I discovered that the strangely formed body has represented absolute Otherness in all times and places since human history began.”¹⁸⁶ Pearl’s conception and the hint that her father is the Black Man who haunts the forest certainly classifies her body as “strangely formed.” Pearl is described while still in Hester’s womb: “In giving her existence a great law had been broken; and the result was a being whose elements were perhaps beautiful and brilliant, but all in disorder, or with an order peculiar to themselves, amidst which the point of variety and arrangement was difficult or impossible to be discovered” (83). Pearl’s body *is* strange. When Pearl plays her childish games in the forest, she imagines the natural inhabitants as friends and enemies: “The pine-trees, aged, black, and solemn, and flinging groans and other melancholy utterances on the breeze, needed little transformation to figure as Puritan elders; the ugliest weeds of the garden were their children, whom Pearl smote down and uprooted most unmercifully” (87), as though Pearl could sense the humbuggery of the town and its holiest minister. In the forest she barely disturbs a fox’s nap and the narrator tells us: “A wolf, it is said,--but here the tale has surely lapsed into the improbable,--came up, and smelt of Pearl’s robe, and offered his savage head to be patted by her hand” (187-188). Pearl finds all she needs to be herself in the wild forest. As Sophia Bell explains of Pearl: “This Othering of a naughty white child is unique in the midcentury literary phenomenon of the naughty child” (87). Pearl, even before she is born, is marked by the freakishness of her scarlet mother. Hawthorne’s narrator describes Pearl in the womb: “The mother’s impassioned state had been the medium through which were transmitted to the unborn infant the rays of its moral life; and, however white and clear originally, they had taken the deep stains of crimson and gold, the fiery lustre,

¹⁸⁶ Leslie A. Fielder, foreword, *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland Thompson (New York: NYU Press, 1996): xiii.

the black shadow, and the untempered light of the intervening substance” (83). Hester’s sin corrupts Pearl’s moral development in-utero and forevermore, “Mother and daughter stood together in the same circle of seclusion from human society; and in the nature of the child seemed to be perpetuated those unquiet elements that had distracted Hester Prynne before Pearl’s birth, but had since begun to be soothed away by the softening influences of maternity” (87). Hester becomes a mother, which changes her status somewhat from scarlet woman to fallen, forgivable mother. As Elizabeth McNeil reminds us, in antebellum America, “The woman’s body—grotesque by definition in a misogynistic culture—is connected to the rest of the world through maternity. . .” (13). So Hester is connected to the Puritan community through her maternity, needlework, and nursing skills. Motherhood was a powerful force in nineteenth century America as Douglas explains: “. . . American women over the course of the nineteenth century were able to exonerate almost any action performed in the sacred name of motherhood” (75). Hester, as a mother, needs a position in the community, which will enable her to support her child. Pearl, however, is always seen “. . .like a thing incapable and unintelligent of human sorrow” (85). She is a freak physically, emotionally and morally. Before Pearl is born and during her childhood the Puritans “. . . had got a vague idea of something outlandish, unearthly, or at variance with ordinary fashions . . .” (86) in the child.

Hawthorne’s novel had an impact on writers of his time in terms of presenting freakish moral others. George Thompson in *Clara and Catherine* published in 1854 models one of his characters on Hester. One of Thompson’s descriptions of a fallen woman is: “. . .and a close observer would be charmed with the peculiarly melancholy and tender expression of her dark eyes, which indicate the depth and intensity of her soul” (6). In contemporary literature, the dark lady and strong woman is illustrated in the character Fleur Pillager, in Louise Erdrich’s *Tracks*.

Fleur, a Native American, is clearly a contemporary version of Hester. Fleur is Hester Prynne; Fleur has a daughter Lulu (the Pearl in this text). Similar to Hester, Fleur does not have a husband and the community of Chippewa Indians believes Fleur has slept with the lake monster, Misshepeshu, and Lulu, the child freak, is the product of that monstrous relationship. Similarly, the community of Puritans believes Hester has slept with the Black Man who roams the forest, and Pearl is his demonic daughter. Fleur, like Hester, fends for herself and supports her family. Fleur is a strong woman who shape-shifts into a bear to defend herself and is incapable of drowning, due to her close relationship with the fearful lake monster. Hester's "A" goes through many interpretations in the text as she shape-shifts from a fallen woman to a capable "Able" supporter of her child and healer of the community.

Fleur travels to the land of the dead to save her dying daughter, Lulu. Like Hester, Fleur's real harm comes from religious leaders. Fleur dislikes the religious orders attempting to Christianize the Indians. Pauline, an Indian turned Catholic nun, attempts to convert Nanapush, Fleur, Eli, Lulu and others and is a demented, ineffectual Dimmesdalesque nun, who similarly scourges herself, wears her shoes backwards, refuses to relieve herself except once a day, and utilizes burlap clothing that chafes her skin in order to offer her sufferings up to God. It is impossible to read Fleur's story and not see the influence Hawthorne's Hester Prynne has on the protagonist and her freak child Lulu. Fleur at great cost to herself and her happiness takes care of her daughter Lulu, who is dark-haired and exceptionally beautiful, as is Pearl. Fleur although staged as a witch, is more humane, understanding, and charitable than members of the religious orders sent to convert her and other "heathen" natives. Dimmesdale, in a similar way, spends all of the novel overly concerned with himself, his image, and his suffering whereas Hester supports herself and Pearl, yet still has time to tend to the sick, make clothes for the poor, and be of

service to the community by her handiwork and by honestly admitting her sin. Fleur in *Tracks* is the same. Although Pauline believes she is Fleur's moral superior, Fleur takes care of Pauline; Fleur is the maternal one who lives on the outskirts of town and even helps her enemies. Hester similarly helps the poor who curse her. "None so ready as she to give of her little substance to every demand of poverty; even though the bitter-hearted pauper threw back a gibe in requital of the food brought regularly to his door, or the garments wrought for him by the fingers that could have embroidered a monarch's robe. None so self-devoted as Hester, when pestilence stalked the town" (147). Hester's self reliance and goodness has inspired other fictional strong women warriors who, with their children, are similarly staged as freakish, powerful outcasts in other societies. The strong women's daughters bear the freakish stigma of their mothers' otherness, as does Pearl. Rachel Adams explains the mother child connection: "Mothers are at the heart of *Geek Love*, for they are storytellers whose bodies hold the terrible and fantastic power of reproduction, the only source of authentic, 'born freaks'" (20). Pearl is a born freak; through Hester's body Pearl is created and the freak has the power to unmask Dimmesdale's hypocrisy. Henry Giles explains Pearl uniqueness as a childhood ideal even among authors' attempts to encapsulate childhood and define society. Giles states of Pearl:

A true jewel she is, glistening and gleaming with sweet yet unsettled and uncertain luster amidst all the darker fragments of the story; a playful sprite, and yet sorrowful; a cherub that seems to have lost its pathway out of heaven and found itself on earth, smiling with the sweetness of higher spheres, yet somber also with the melancholy of this lower world. Nothing, perhaps, has more tested genius than to give the ideal of childhood. We have now before our minds the Mignone of Goethe, the Fenella of Scott, the Little Nell of Dickens; but we think that Pearl takes hold of our last, almost strongest affections by a

wildness, a delicacy, and enchantment which none of them possess—which they certainly do not possess, as she does, in union with a weird, woodlike, sylvan witchery. (84)

Pearl is as unique as America is. There's no "sylvan witchery" like there is here any place else in the world—only here could such a character spring from such an American author.

Through *The Scarlet Letter* we learn of our austere Puritan ancestors, yet the Barnumesque sideshow staging of Hester and Pearl is clearly a nineteenth century phenomenon. In the mid-nineteenth century nationalistic feelings in America were strong. Emanuel Leutze painted *Washington Crossing the Delaware* in 1851¹⁸⁷ and part of the draw of the Joice Heth spectacle was that she could tell first hand stories of our famous founding father, George Washington and thus connect us to our past. Washington had become a demigod in America and all information about him and his life was sought and cherished. A massive statue of George Washington arrived from Amsterdam to the Virginia capital in Richmond in 1858 and instead of having horses pull the weighty statue, humans did because: "...Virginians would not accord this privilege to animals."¹⁸⁸ Books not just about Washington, but also about his mother, Mary Washington, were published in abundance as the cult of motherhood flourished and people credited mothers with their progeny's accomplishments.¹⁸⁹ Although the country was young, reaching back to its foundation and attempting to hold on to its roots in the face of so much change in the postal, the print, the publishing, and the coast-to-coast railroad expansion, is understandable. People did not want to lose themselves or their American heritage in the

¹⁸⁷ Emanuel Leutze, *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

<http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/20011777>

¹⁸⁸ Marshall W. Fishwick, "Virginians on Olympus: Iv. George Washington: America's First Demigod," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 59.1 (1951): 51-71. "Unreserved praise for Washington had become by the middle of the century a standard American attribute. This adulation was not limited to America: it flourished mightily on the other side of the Atlantic. This was especially true in France..." (51).

¹⁸⁹ Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Anchor, 1977): 74. "Books on mothers of famous men, especially Mary Washington, mother of George Washington, poured from the presses in the 1840s and 1850s; their message was that men achieved greatness because of the instruction and inspiration they received from their mothers" (74).

modernization process.¹⁹⁰ In a similar way Hawthorne touches back to *his* Puritan roots for his story which mirrors antebellum America touching back to its late eighteenth century birth. Reconnecting with the founding fathers was important as a grounding process for the expanding nation. In this vein, Barnum's presentation of Joice Heth's body marries the past and the present. Washington's nursemaid is a spectacle and the modern staging of Heth utilizes the press and Barnum's American Museum to present a microcosm of the past to the present community—for a price. Barnum knows how to market. "(Heth was variously portrayed as an authentic link to the national past, a racial grotesque, a fraudulent sham, an imposter, a subhuman 'freak,' and even an automaton), and was an object of immense fascination for the public..." (189).¹⁹¹ It would seem that all nineteenth century technology was utilized to profit from the exhibited body of Joice Heth, a famous connection to the past. Pearl is also a contemporary freak connected to the Puritan past. As Cook explains: "...the sideshow maintained much older carnivalesque rituals, such as the carney's pitch and the intimate fascinations of the anomalous body" (5).¹⁹² Pearl's sideshow takes place in the much older Puritan past, and through the past she enacts antebellum carnivalesque rituals.

Reynolds explains that Hawthorne viewed Pearl as the representation of nineteenth century America itself: "Little Pearl, the wild child of the likable criminal and the reverend rake, figuratively represents the aftermath of Puritan culture—the directionlessness, perversity, and irrationalism Hawthorne always associated with nineteenth-century America" (267).¹⁹³

Pearl, the freak child, *is* nineteenth century America. As Hawthorne states: "The soul beheld its

¹⁹⁰ Benjamin Reiss, "P.T. Barnum, Joice Heth and Antebellum Spectacles of Race," *American Quarterly* 51.1 (1999): 78-107. "As the nation underwent its most rapid period of urbanization, widespread anxieties about loss of tradition surfaced in society and politics" (87).

¹⁹¹ Eden Oschua, rev. of *The Showman And The Slave: Race, Death, And Memory In Barnum's America*, by Benjamin Reiss, *American Literature* 75.1 (2003): 187-189. *America: History & Life*. Web. 6 Nov. 2012.

¹⁹² Phineas T. Barnum, *The Colossal P.T. Barnum Reader: Nothing Else Like It In The Universe*, ed. James W. Cook (Urbana: U Chicago Press, 2005): 5.

¹⁹³ Reynolds, *Beneath The American Renaissance* 267.

features in the mirror of the passing moment.”¹⁹⁴ Pearl mirrors the country that is simultaneously the most modern, most childish, and most outlandish; the freak reflects and captures the rebellious American spirit that is still alive and well today, and P.T. Barnum showed America how to sell itself to the world as the greatest show (country) on earth. Then, the sideshow bark became reality.

¹⁹⁴ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (Toronto: Bantam, 1981) 174.

Chapter 4 Topsy-Turvy Sideshow Freaks in *Uncle Tom's Cabin: or, Life Among the Lowly*.

Topsy was soon a noted character in the establishment. Her talent for every species of drollery, grimace, and mimicry,--for dancing, tumbling, climbing, singing, whistling, imitating every sound that hit her fancy,--seemed inexhaustible. In her play-hours, she invariably had every child in the establishment at her heels, open-mouthed with admiration and wonder,--not excepting Miss Eva, who appeared to be fascinated by her wild diablerie, as a dove is sometimes charmed by a glittering serpent. Miss Ophelia was uneasy that Eva should fancy Topsy's society so much, and implored St. Clare to forbid it. (269)

Introduction

In Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* the analogy of the dove and glittering serpent, which Stowe uses to characterize Eva and Topsy, is interesting in this topsy-turvy novel where characters sometimes shift places. The “. . .dove. . . charmed by a glittering serpent” may be an allusion to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's unfinished poem “Christabel,” which investigates the consequences of inviting evil into the home. In the poem Bard Bracy relates his dream:

I went and peered, and could descry
 No cause for her distressful cry;
 But yet for her dear lady's sake
 I stooped, methought, the dove to take,
 When lo! I saw a bright green snake
 Coiled around its wings and neck
 Green as the herbs on which it couched,
 Close by the dove's its head it crouched;
 And with the dove it heaves and stirs,
 Swelling its neck and she swelled hers!
 I woke; it was the midnight hour,
 The clock was echoing in the tower.... (545-556)

Christabel, the protagonist of Coleridge's poem, invites the evil witch Geraldine into the castle. The result of this invitation is a topsy-turvy event wherein good and evil are misconstrued. In a similar vein, St. Clare invites the glittering serpent Topsy into his home wherein dove-Eva

resides. Bard Bracy's dream in "Christabel" reveals a dove being strangled by a barely perceptible snake, which has stealthily coiled about the struggling dove. Bracy's dream portends evil, but the question is: who is the dove and who is the snake? Christabel's father misinterprets the dream and, enchanted by the witch's beauty, believes Geraldine is the dove in need of protection. The serpentine witch is mistaken for the dove, and Christabel, the real dove, is rendered inarticulate and cast as a hissing serpent. Just as Bracy's dream is misinterpreted, so are the topsy-turvy, Topsy-Eva forces of good and evil in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In Miss Ophelia's and Stowe's view, the dove is Eva and the serpent is Topsy. Ophelia is afraid Topsy's evil will taint Eva, though Topsy is saved by Eva. Eva never needs protection from Topsy; it is Topsy, mistakenly cast as a "glittering serpent," that is exploited and needs protection. Topsy steps into Eva's role and plays the savior's part rescuing the reader from misconstruing slavery. So the consequence of Topsy's invitation into the St. Clare household is enlightenment for all. Stowe may have had the readers' homes in mind when she alludes to Coleridge's poem. What is the consequence of inviting slavery into our homes (into our country) in nineteenth century America? It may be another case of mistaking good for evil, wherein the slaves are offered salvation because of their suffering, and the masters' ensured damnation. Slavery's financial benefits are serpents disguised as doves. Once the witch is invited in, all hell breaks loose. We are simultaneously bewitched and enchanted by the freak Topsy, and the reader is left "open-mouthed with admiration and wonder" at the feat she accomplishes: allowing us to see the serpent as the savior and slavery as the evil we have willingly invited into our country and must expel.

Uncle Tom's Cabin juxtaposes Topsy and Eva as serpent and angel, but how does Stowe stage freaks in her text? Harriet Beecher Stowe at the end of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* explains why

she wrote the novel. She wanted to react to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and bear witness as a northerner to the horrors of slavery. She was shocked that northerners were required by law to get involved and return slaves who had miraculously escaped bondage in the south. She says of this horrible event: “These men and Christians cannot know what slavery is; if they did, such a question could never be open for discussion. And from this arose a desire to exhibit it in a *living dramatic reality*” (470). Stowe is exhibiting slavery, through the various freaks in her text, by placing it on the auction block for all to view. Through her slavery spectacle she has slaves perform minstrel freak shows with an admirable goal: to entertain and horrify readers thereby causing them to reject slavery once and for all. Mr. Dan Haley, the slave trader, is one Barnumesque character whose trained eye ceaselessly seeks freaks to display for profit in Stowe’s text and Augustine St. Clare is another. St. Clare purchases Topsy because she puts on a good show.

P.T. Barnum a great showman and American patriot had been known to defend America from criticism regarding slavery. In 1844 when Barnum was aboard the *Princess Royal* bound for Glasgow, some Scotsmen stated: “Were it not for slavery. . . America would be the greatest, best, and justly the proudest nation in the universe. . .” (*The Colossal P.T. Barnum Reader* 78). Europeans thought slavery in America a horrible blemish on the promising new country and a barbaric institution that should be abolished. Barnum retorts that he is neither an abolitionist nor a defender of slavery; he promotes America as the greatest country, despite the existence of slavery and states that slavery is complicated. Barnum answers the Scots: “. . . I thought these philanthropic gentlemen should remember that ‘charity begins at home,’ and they could talk with more consistency against the evil of American slavery when they had made the *poor working people* of England, Scotland and Ireland half so happy as were the southern blacks” (*The*

Colossal P.T. Barnum Reader 78). Barnum echoes many antebellum anti-abolitionists when he states that black slavery is not as bad as white slavery; the underpaid white factory workers, according to Barnum, were in a more deplorable position; they were mistreated in Europe and northern cities in America. Barnum explains that it is to the southern states' benefit to treat their slaves well: “. . . masters of slaves were induced by interest alone, if they had no higher motive, to use their negroes well-to feed and clothe them to provide for their comfort in decrepitude and old age, and that, on the whole, they were much happier than the *starving workies* of this country [Scotland], who could scarcely earn a subsistence. . . ” (*The Colossal P.T. Barnum Reader* 78). Barnum, always one with the instinct to detect thoughts and desires of the populace, echoes Brantlinger in “Victorians and Africans,” who believes: “. . . abolitionism contained the seeds of empire. . . By mid-century, the success of the antislavery movement, the impact of the great Victorian explorers, and the merger of racist and evolutionary doctrines in the social sciences had combined to give the British public a widely shared view of Africa that demanded imperialization on moral, religious and scientific grounds” (167). Barnum senses the Scotsman's criticism of American slavery serves English colonization goals. Slavery was legally abolished in the British Isles, but the racist colonization of British territories was flourishing and providing wealth for the mother country at the expense of humanity. Imperialism and slavery are twins. Stowe deals with these and many other questions about slavery in her text. One of the biggest concerns is emblemized by Topsy. What do we do with slaves once they are free?

Barnum points out the flawed criticism of America and in doing so, clearly insists that America is the greatest place in the world. Barnum's sideshow bark touting the greatest show on earth became reality as the young American republic began to take its place as the greatest country in the world with seemingly endless opportunities for all, despite slavery. Slavery,

however, does not allow the country to fulfill its aspirations. Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel was a catalyst for change and a spark for the war that would engulf America and end slavery in the United States. She like Barnum wants to shape the public's tastes and sell her novel. She writes humanely about the injustices of slavery and through her writing, change came to pass and readers saw slavery as monstrous. This chapter will place Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or Life Among the Lowly* in its literary and historical context, utilize close readings to illustrate how Stowe's slave characters, most notably the lowly Topsy, are staged as freaks, and emphasize the impact Stowe's text has had on the nation's perception of itself through the freak show slavery, particularly the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, the Civil War, and contemporary views of those events in American history. All slaves at this time period were cast as children. P. Foreman accurately explains, that the relationship between slaves and masters: "... is informed by a patron-child hierarchy which mirrors the slave patriarchy, where slave is figured as child and master as patriarch" ("The Spoken and the Silenced" 315). So although this study highlights Topsy, it will become clear that slaves like Harry, Eliza, and George are similarly staged as child freaks. Phineas Taylor Barnum's influence permeates Stowe's text from the very first pages of the novel where slaves are exhibited for entertainment; Topsy performs a freak's, a minstrel's, and a minister's role in the text and Stowe utilizes Barnum's entrepreneurial skills to stage her freaks and present her novel as the nation's own slave narrative.

Harriet Beecher Stowe said that she did not write *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, God did. In *Mightier than the Sword* Reynolds informs us that Stowe confided to a friend: "No. I only put down what I saw . . . It came before me in visions, one after another, and I put them down in

words” (xiii). Her story captivated readers with its “ocularcentric”¹⁹⁵ visions of abused slaves. A wide readership engaged in Stowe’s text: “*Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was the most popular book in the antebellum United States, with the possible exception of the Bible” (Hochman 82). The public through reading Stowe’s text experiences the sideshow of Harry’s Jim Crow routine, Eliza’s amazing ice crossing, George Harris’s freedom gunfight, Topsy’s minstrel antics, and the cruelty of callous, vicious masters. Stowe’s novel makes us feel pain. As Bernstein in *Racial Innocence* explains: “When abolitionists dramatized slaves’ pain—indeed, when sentimental writers such as Stowe provoked readers sympathetically to feel slaves’ pain—they based an argument for human rights on the ability to suffer” (50-1). Arguably, all the slave children in the text suffer enfreakment: Eliza is staged as a “fancy girl,” Harry as the Jim Crow minstrel tap dancing freak, George Harris as the beaten down white-negro husband and father, and Topsy as the irreligious savage freak who needs to be tamed as if she were a wild animal. This slave spectacle, vicariously viewed by a worldwide readership, aroused awareness of slavery’s injustices and sparked the American Civil War through its presentation of slaves as freaks.

The Parade of Freak Slaves

“For, sir, he [Uncle Tom] was a man,--and you are but another man. And, woman, though dressed in silk and jewels, you are but a woman, and, in life’s great straits and mighty griefs, ye feel but one sorrow” (50).

Stowe ensures readers feel grief by witnessing the break up of families in the novel. In the opening pages Dan Haley is the Barnumesque entrepreneur who scouts out Mr. Shelby’s plantation for slaves, in order to settle Mr. Shelby’s debt. In *The Colossal P.T. Barnum Reader* Barnum callously discusses how he exhibited Joice Heth for profit and rejoices in the humbug he pulled off by pretending that she was George Washington’s 161 year old nurse. He exhibits Heth as a freak and, to spark more interest, proclaims that she is a hoax, not even alive but a

¹⁹⁵ Phineas T. Barnum, *The Colossal P.T. Barnum Reader: Nothing Else Like It In The Universe*, ed. James W. Cook (Urbana: U Chicago, 2005) 5.

robot made of rubber: “I stated that Joyce Heth was a wonderful piece of mechanism . . . That she was no more nor less than a machine made of India Rubber and whalebone, and that the responses to questions put, were made by a ventriloquist. Thousands flocked to see the automaton, and I made—I coined money out of this scheme” (*The Colossal P.T. Barnum Reader* 39). Barnum brags that he treats the blind Heth well and makes her happy by ladling whiskey down her throat, which is all she truly wants, and he (great man that he is) freely supplies her with the desired spirits. Just so, Haley attempts to convince Mr. Shelby to give him the slaves and explains that he will make the freaks’ lives better by exhibiting and selling them to good families; so Haley does the same cultural work as Barnum at the outset of the novel—they both satisfy a public hunger for freaks—they both profit by exhibiting and selling others. Daydan in “Amorous Bondage” explains that Stowe’s presentation of slaves is fraught with mixed messages: “The acclaimed dispossession of Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* works only as long as the ‘negro’ is kept forever separate in essence from the Anglo-Saxon, locked in the precincts of affectionate service, impressionable spirituality, and childlike simplicity. Stowe’s fantasy, brimful of just pity, remains entirely affirming and satisfying to the ‘superior’ white ego” (251). The reference to “childlike simplicity” is clear: slaves are children. In *The American Child* Lesley Ginsberg’s “Of Babies, Beasts, and Bondage” states: “According to William Drayton’s vitriolic *The South Vindicated* (1836), the condition of dependency means that slaves are merely children by another name: ‘the negro is a child in his nature, and the white man is to him as a father’” (90). Barnum’s staged others under the veil of educating viewers about the world and exotic others. He was a father figure to Tom Thumb and he even collected money, which he pocketed, to free Joice Heth’s great grandchildren from bondage; and he certainly treated Heth like a child even telling her how to speak and behave. Both Barnum and Stowe educate viewers

and readers from an elite, white, privileged platform. When the freaks are rescued in Stowe's novel they are taken elsewhere and "kept forever separate"; and do not remain as equals in the society where they once lived. Eliza, George and Harry are in Canada and Topsy leaves with Miss Ophelia and later is an evangelist in Africa. Barnum did not reside with the freaks he exhibited; Stowe, even in fiction, ensures the freaks live fulfilling lives elsewhere.

The slave trader wants Shelby to let him have not only Harry, but also the boy's mother Eliza due to the debt. The breaking up of these and many more families in Stowe's novel engulfs the families in the text and the larger family of readers in an emotional firestorm, which causes them to experience "mighty griefs" and to "feel but one sorrow" because of slavery. It is not clear to whom the title villain is most apt, the slave trader or the slave owner who ensures the trader's existence and profitability. The freaks' grief is profitable for Haley and enables Stowe to market her novel. Halttunen explains: "Sentimental art undertook to teach virtue by softening the heart and eliciting tears of tender sympathy . . ." ("Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain" 307). Readers of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* shed lots of sympathetic tears.

At the outset Mr. Shelby deals with the inebriated Haley when Eliza's boy Harry enters, and Mr. Shelby demands that he perform. Mr. Shelby entices Haley with boy's antics—Shelby whets Haley's appetite for Harry's minstrel show performance. Mr. Shelby has Harry dance, sing and pantomime an older slave; this exhibit has Mr. Shelby calling little Harry "Jim Crow." In short Harry's parlor exhibition has the trader thinking auction block; the child's performance attracts Mr. Haley, and he throws the boy ". . . a quarter of an orange" as a reward for Harry's funny sideshow, just as one would reward a circus animal for performing tricks on command. When Haley sees Harry perform, he thinks of staging and selling him, thereby profiting from the boy's exoticness. Shelby tells Harry to mimic Uncle Cudjoe, and immediately Harry gets into

character: “Instantly the flexible limbs of the child assumed the appearance of deformity and distortion, as, with his back humped up, and his master’s stick in his hand, he hobbled around the room his childish face drawn into a doleful pucker . . .” (14). Both men laugh at Harry’s performance and it becomes clear to the reader that the boy is valued for his minstrel skills.

When Harry’s mother Eliza comes in, Haley boldly looks her up and down and sizes up her worth as if she were already on the auction block. He says to Shelby regarding Eliza: “You might make your fortune on that ar gal in Orleans, any day. I’ve seen over a thousand, in my day, paid down for gals not a bit handsomer” (15). Haley wants to auction off Eliza and her son as saleable children. African American slaves were viewed as children as David Wiggins in “The Play of Slave Children in the Plantation Communities of the Old South, 1820-1860” explains: “Historians often viewed slaves as barbarians to be civilized; as perpetual children at best, and animals at worst” (21). In a perversion of a stock sale where farmers view livestock and assess the cattle’s worth, Mr. Haley envisions Eliza and Harry up for inspection as he is sure they will fetch a handsome price. As Adams in *Sideshow U.S.A.* explains: “The structure of the freak show has typically been described as a form of spectacle, a term that accurately captures the sensational, formulaic qualities of the exhibition space . . . the modern phenomenon of spectacle is premised on the sensory dominance of the visual and measured distance between the viewer and the choreographed activity of the performers” (12). Eliza and Harry would be the freak performers and the “exhibition space” would be the auction block; and in this spectacle--slaves for sale--consumers would visually inspect the slaves and assess their worth. Mr. Haley will exhibit them as Barnum did exotic others and animals in his museum. Haley claims he will humanely, albeit profitably, exhibit the slaves put into his care; as he explains he is only after what everyone is after, a good living. Fiedler in *Freaks* discusses how “. . . Barnum refers to

human anomalies not as Freaks but as ‘curiosities. . .’” (15), and here Eliza and Harry are seen through trader’s keen eye as *curiosities*—exhibitable freaks. Haley knows Eliza’s beauty and mixed race will fetch a good price and that interests him. She will be one of his titillating curiosities, should he succeed and convince Shelby to sell her as well as Harry. Elizabeth McNeil in “Un-‘Freak’ing Black Female Selfhood” explains what it means to be a black woman in antebellum America: “In the nineteenth-century United States, in addition to being displayed and prodded on auction blocks, black women were showcased in sideshows, newsprint, broadsides, song, drama, photography, World Fairs, and literature as grotesque and exotic ‘freaks’” (11). Haley’s inspection of Eliza and her son establishes his intent to stage them as freaks in his auction block sideshow. Through Haley’s observation and Stowe’s descriptions, the readers are forced to envision the auction as a voyeuristic titillation.

From the readers’ first encounter with a slave in the novel, the stage is set and the tension is palpable; we see that because Harry is such a good performer, he will be taken from his mother and a family will be shattered. We subsequently learn that Eliza and George Harris were married by a minister in Mr. Shelby’s own home, and that Eliza lost two infants before she had her healthy, beautiful baby boy to whom she is wildly dedicated. She says to the senator’s wife, Mrs. Bird: “I have lost two, one after another,--left ‘em buried there when I came away; and I had only this one left. I never slept a night without him; he was all I had. He was my comfort and pride, day and night; and, ma’am, they were going to take him away from me...” (97). Mr. Shelby sells the beloved boy away from his mother to satisfy his debts. In detailing the worse case scenario for northern readers, Stowe makes people’s nightmares come true. Who could stand to lose their only child? The horrible thought is unbearable, but Stowe utilizes horror to make her point that this is happening daily; families are broken; children are sold away from

their parents. Barnum's American Museum sought to entertain and educate. People could come and see the freaks, but also learn about other cultures, exotic animals, and scientific discoveries. The museum was wildly popular and partly educational, as Saxon in "P.T. Barnum and the American Museum," explains: "For the American Museum aspired to be—and probably was under Barnum's management—the largest and most comprehensive establishment of its kind in America" (134). Stowe in her novel attempts to attract a similar readership to the text to be simultaneously entertained, astonished, horrified, and educated about slavery in antebellum America. Her text, like Barnum's museum, is didactic and entertaining. Her text, like Barnum's museum, was wildly popular. Susan Stabile in "Still(ed) Lives" discusses Barnum's staging of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* at the American Museum, but shows that although the play was marketed as "'Virtue triumphant and Vice detestable,' the play perpetuated the racism of its black minstrelsy. It paralleled Barnum's frequent analogy between African Americans and 'Madam'lle Fanny,' his prized orangutan" (395-6). Stowe's message is admirable, though she too utilizes horrific imagery and slave stereotyping, especially through Topsy, to bark and talk up her characters. Reynolds in *Mightier than the Sword* discusses a stage character in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* performances, Gumption Cute, who discusses ". . . becoming a Barnumesque showman and exhibiting Topsy as a 'wooly gal,' just as Barnum had exhibited a Wooly Horse" (141). Stowe's characters take on a stage life of their own, and lend themselves to racial ridicule, even as they simultaneously highlight the evils of slavery through their enfreakment.

Haley is bereft of Eliza and Harry, as Eliza runs away, but the trader leaves with his prized possession, Uncle Tom the faithful Shelby slave. The master slave boundary vanishes in a flood of tears when Tom is sold to Haley and must leave his family: "And in those tears they all shed together, the high and the lowly melted away all the heart-burnings and anger of the

oppressed” (111). Mrs. Shelby suffers when slaves are sold and she promises to help return Uncle Tom to his family; it never happens. As Debord says: “In a world that is *really upside down*, the true is a moment of the false.”¹⁹⁶ Mr. Shelby tries to present himself as a savior not a demon for selling his faithful slave, Tom. Stowe brings this hypocrisy out in her narrative when she tells us that of all the slaves on the Shelby plantation, “Uncle Tom, [was] Mr. Shelby’s best hand,” yet he is the first slave promised to the trader because he will fetch a weighty price. The promises made to slaves are not worth keeping. As Stowe explains after another slave family is broken up for the master’s financial gain: “But what needs tell the story, told too oft,--every day told,--of heart-strings rent and broken,--the weak broken and torn for the profit and convenience of the strong! It needs not to be told;--every day is telling it. . . (139). Stowe is masterful at narrating a tale, which will elicit a desired response from the readers. She wants the freak show spectacle that is slavery to end; she wants families to remain together. She also mentions the hypocrisy of politicians who have stopped the slave trade in Africa, but allow it to continue in this country: “Trading Negroes from Africa, dear reader, is so horrid. It is not to be thought of! But trading them from Kentucky,--that’s quite another thing!” (148). The pontificating in Washington regarding the slave trade in Africa is admirable, but ensuring slavery is ended in the United States is a trickier more delicate matter. Stowe stages slaves in this novel to ensure that the freak show is not just ephemeral entertainment, but an indelible experience that will forever change readers’ minds regarding slavery. However, the only way Harry, Eliza, George, Topsy and Tom could possibly be sold is if they were viewed as freaks. The fact that these entertaining,

¹⁹⁶ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*. (Paris, 1967). Translated by Ken Knabb. <http://evans-experientialism.freewebspace.com/debord.htm>

beautiful, intelligent, bewitching, faithful “family members” can be sold validates their freak status as they are only seen as profitable bodies.

Masters’ treachery towards slaves permeates this text just as Barnum uses his freaks for profit and entertainment by selling their bodies. From the very beginning of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* Stowe stages slaves as freaks and places them on pedestals to be gawked at, laughed at, priced, sold, touched, and utilized as profitable entertainment. Erickson explains, “In the era of P. T. Barnum, publishers and other entrepreneurs of culture were discovering new ways to stand out from the mass of print and other matter to ‘capitalize on psychic bonds and links of desire forged between the reading public and the objects of its fascination.’”¹⁹⁷ The mid nineteenth century reading public was fascinated with Barnum’s freaks and simultaneously torn apart by slavery’s moral, financial, and ethical repercussions. Slavery is morally wrong, but financially lucrative. Displaying freaks is a questionable but entertaining and profitable endeavor. The freaks and Barnum profit from the exhibit, (Barnum much more than the freaks) but if a narrative is constructed in which both displayed freak and showman can be constructed as educators, the stigma of freakishness is lessened.

Whereas one facet of Thompson’s city mysteries novels was to appall and titillate the reader, Stowe’s freaks attract respectable readers to an educating and elevating Barnumesque sideshow, but the titillation is also present. Once attracted to Stowe’s exotic slave exposé, similar in its content to Barnum’s American Museum, one views freaks within the pages of Stowe’s novel. Various freaks people Stowe’s text. Freaks who are bought and sold, auctioned off, raped, whipped, beaten to death, hunted by dogs, and purchased as sex slaves can be found within Stowe’s text. Barnum’s American Museum attracted a polyglot audience of poets, writers

¹⁹⁷ Paul Erickson, "New Books, New Men: City-Mysteries Fiction, Authorship, And The Literary Market," *Early American Studies, An Interdisciplinary Journal* 1.1 (2003): 273-312.

and workingmen who came to enjoy the educational, yet voyeuristic exhibits. David Wall in “A Chaos of Sin and Folly” explains, “While Barnum’s exhibits have been traditionally understood as offering largely working-class entertainment, the audience for Barnum’s extravagant displays was actually, as James Cook points out, marked by an astonishing heterogeneity” (528). The high and the low came to Barnum’s for a peep at the freak show and an enlightening experience perhaps of a moral play in one of the lecture rooms. Stabile in “Still(ed) Lives” discusses the decorum white women patrons lent to Barnum’s American Museum: “As museum patrons, then, white women lent civility to Barnum’s unruly miscellany of live animals, taxidermic specimens and exploited humans” (395). Similarly through Stowe’s novel, a white woman’s text lent “civility” to the national conversation regarding an uncivilized and brutal institution, slavery. But make no mistake, there is a freak show in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Stowe writes about the abuse of slaves while educating and entertaining readers. Barnum and Stowe satisfy the public’s desire for information and spectacle in their respective venues. Stowe’s novel was a magnificent best-seller, read worldwide and it spurred Bibles sales which speaks to its didacticism. And as writer “C.” in the newspaper *The Spirit of the Times* on June 16, 1853 explains the enormous popularity of Barnum’s Museum: “I had previously visited the Museum, as nearly every person does who stops one day in New York . . .” (236). Meaning that even if a person had only one day to spend in New York, one would visit Barnum’s American Museum. Everyone read Stowe’s text whether to praise it or criticize it, and everyone visited Barnum’s Museum.

Both Stowe and Barnum deal with issues of race and what it means to be black and white in antebellum America and tap into the spectator society in which they live. Brodhead in “Veiled Ladies” explains the pressure on writers mid-century to reach a public fascinated with shows. He says: “The dominant world of writing in mid-nineteenth-century America was the

highly vicarious, highly managed, privacy-addressing, mass-public one that came together around 1850; and the central fact of literary life then was that a writer who hoped to reach a significant public would have to engage a communication system structured on those terms” (290); and Stowe does by channeling Barnum’s tactics. Through her novel she utilizes freak slaves to mirror and entertain the nation. Topsy is one of those freaks.

Topsy is not a submissive slave. She is purchased by St. Clare to save her from a brutal master, but also because he enjoys her antics. Once Ophelia has taught her to make beds and other domestic matters and is assured that Topsy no longer requires supervision, she leaves Topsy to the task and “Topsy would hold a perfect carnival of confusion, for some one or two hours” (270). Topsy learns quickly, but she does what she wants to do when she is not being observed by Miss Ophelia. “...she would climb the posts, and hang head downward from the tops; flourish the sheets and spreads all over the apartment; dress the bolster up in Miss Ophelia’s night-clothes, and enact various performances with that,--singing and whistling, and making grimaces at herself in the looking-glass...” (270). Topsy is a high wire performer, and she knows how to have fun and entertain herself; she is also entertaining to the readers as she validates minstrel stereotypes with her behavior.

In an exhibition at Barnum’s, the reflection of the nation’s obsession with race is concretized. This exhibit’s narrative was constructed to display a racially pure, white slave from Constantinople, as the whitest white woman in the world, who simultaneously possessed black characteristics. This Circassian Beauty’s freakery is her mixed body. She embodies white American’s obsession with whiteness, and black American’s slave status and these concerns coalesce on stage in one body. Frost In *Never One Nation*, discusses P.T. Barnum’s staging of the whitest white woman as if she were displayed before the public as a black slave at auction:

Racial superiority then, to some degree concretized the Circassian Beauty's beauty, making her the whitest, most racially pure specimen of a human woman to be found on earth. Perhaps this accounted for the marketability of the Circassian Beauty: the whitest of the white, yet a slave, the Beauty combined the purity of the white woman with the sexual availability of the slave. She could at once be both worshipped and raped. (66-67)

It is a noteworthy cross section of popular interests and current events, this exhibit of a white woman, scantily clothed and gazed at by strangers in Victorian America. The Circassian's freakishness is attained because of her racial purity and slave status, miscegenation not of blood, but staged miscegenation; Barnum constructs her white/black narrative. Barnum, after several failed attempts, finally displays his Circassian woman in 1864; he succeeds in trafficking in the slave trade for his own profit, just as Haley in Stowe's novel rounds up his slave curiosities for profit. One of the curiosities Haley is interested in displaying for profit is the almost white slave, Eliza. Slaves were perceived as children, and as Clark in *Kiddie Lit* explains: "Children and childhood were less segregated from adults and adulthood in the nineteenth century, before the split between high culture and low. . ." (16). To the slave trader, there is not much difference between Harry and his mother Eliza except for the price they will fetch. Each possesses exotic otherness; each is viewed as a child needing a paternal master, and each will command a good price. Stowe's narrator says of Eliza: "Eliza had been brought up by her mistress, from girlhood, as a petted and indulged favorite" (21); the narrator could just as easily have said Eliza was brought up as her mistress' pet, doll, or child.

Stowe has her own topsy-turvy version of the Circassian Beauty in Eliza Harris. Stowe describes Eliza as being so white that she can pass for a white woman, which she does when she runs away from Mr. Shelby's in Kentucky. The issue of miscegenation is important and

complicates the Circassian Beauty's exhibit as she is described as having distinctive "bushy hair." Frost explains: ". . . the Circassian Beauty's signature hairstyle most closely resembles a huge Afro, and this defining characteristic—one affiliated with the African American woman—resonates oddly yet resoundingly with the rest of her identifying significations: her racial purity, her sexual enslavement, her position as colonial subject, her beauty" (66). This white/black beauty embodies the fears and assumptions of the time: the fear of miscegenation and the assumption of white superiority. Stowe describes Eliza's hair as beautiful and Mrs. Shelby in a reverse of normal mistress slave hierarchy, dresses Eliza's hair on her wedding day: ". . . her mistress herself adorned the bride's beautiful hair with orange-blossoms, and threw over it the bridal veil, which certainly could scarce have rested on a fairer head" (24). Eliza's beauty is noticed as people at her wedding "...praise the bride's beauty..." (24). Eliza is almost white, and can be raped by her master and sold as a slave; she too elides racial boundaries. Eliza escapes by passing herself off as a white woman. The white Circassian slave is a white slave and staged as a freakish other because of her exotic birth and instead of staring at a black slave on the auction block, Barnum's audience gawks at the freakish, whitest slave ever displayed. Eliza's son Harry is dressed as a little girl, when the family is escaping to Canada. Harry becomes Harriet and everyone comments on the beautiful, dark girl. Harry upends gender and race as he is staged as a girl—his exotic beauty in a white girl causes endless compliments for the girl's unusual beauty: "Mrs. Smyth, with little Harry, sought the seclusion of the ladies' cabin, where the dark beauty of the supposed little girl drew many flattering comments from the passengers" (413). Harry is an exotic slave boy staged as a dark, beautiful white girl. Fiedler in *Freaks* discusses gender anomalies like the bearded lady who had her equally hirsute son dress as a girl, to enhance his freak status. Madame Fortune Clofullia's son was bearded and "...he was

exhibited in dresses until the age of fourteen, causing some beholders to assume that he was a bearded girl” (149). Harry’s freak status in Stowe’s novel comes not only from his minstrel antics, but because he easily passes for a darkly beautiful white female.

There is no such eliding of white and black when Stowe describes Topsy and Eva and highlights their opposite characteristics:

There stood the two children representatives of the two extremes of society. The fair, high-bred child, with her golden head, her deep eyes, her spiritual, noble brow, and prince-like movements; and her black, keen, subtle, cringing, yet acute neighbor. They stood the representatives of their races. (266-267)

The polar opposites reinforce racial stereotypes and Stowe presents Eva as superior to Topsy in every way possible. Eva and Topsy are placed in opposite corners. It is characters like Eliza and Harry who permeate the boundary line between black and white and therefore present a more fearful scenario—slaves who can pass as free whites. Eva and Topsy define their races in the text—their boundary lines are clear and impermeable.

Harriet Beecher Stowe mimicked Barnum’s freak show antics to present her abolitionist agenda; and the sideshow performers Topsy, Harry, Eliza and George stir up readers on both sides of the slavery issue. Stowe’s novel was read world-wide by an audience which wanted to admire America, but was shocked by the existence of slavery in such a modern country. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* stages freaks to shock and educate readers about slavery in America and encourage its abolition. This text is a microcosm of nineteenth century American society and deals with universal concerns of the period; slaves are cultural others and presented to the readers as freaks, just as Joice Heth was in Barnum’s museum. The Heth exhibit enlightened viewers regarding her humanity, as her constructed narrative elicited money to free her enslaved descendants; Heth

was simultaneously humanized and enfreaked. Stowe similarly showcases her characters' constructed freakishness and their humanity. Stowe's audience was similar to Barnum's as Cook explains in *The Colossal P.T. Barnum Reader*:

Barnum, in short, never achieved mass entertainment on the model we think of today: our Hollywood blockbusters that 'open everywhere.' But he did help to create these cultural conditions. His was a public similar to those we now inhabit: multiregional, heterosocial, and open to all ages; increasingly occularcentric yet never fully silent; constructed by and through discourse; and bound together by taste and habit as much as profession or income. (5)

Stowe is aware of the zeitgeist and is able to bark her novel utilizing Barnum's successful techniques, and through her novel enable change, but part of the way she attracts readers to her text is utilizing their freakish enticement. Reynolds explains in *Mightier than the Sword*:

Another antislavery politician, Joshua Giddings, also featured the novel in a speech before the House, declaring, "A lady with her pen, has done more for the cause of freedom, during the last year, than any savant, statesman, or politician of our land. The inimitable work, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, is now carrying truth to the minds of millions, who, up to this time, have been deaf to the cries of the down-trodden." (150)

It is Stowe's awareness of circus staging that offers the reader Jim Crow routines that readers feel comfortable laughing at, shocking images of slaves' scarred backs which appalls readers, and many instances of broken families, the separation of mothers from their children, and these indelible images foment change. Kearney in "Evil, Monstrosity and The Sublime," discusses the intimate dance of good and evil throughout history, and Stowe's work instructs this dance. In this one work evil is displayed and viewers are attracted to and appalled by the spectacle.

Kearney explains of such a work: “It tries to make moral sense of the monstrous” (486). The immoral display of slave freaks in Stowe’s work illuminates the monstrous in an uncomfortably entertaining and educational way. Kearney further explains the understanding of evil: “Evil ceases to be a matter of paranoid projection or sacrificial scapegoating and becomes instead an affair of human responsibility. Absolutist dualities are overcome. One’s self becomes oneself-as-another and one’s other becomes another-as-oneself” (489). The freaks’ suffering is illustrated through Stowe’s text in the whipping of Topsy and Uncle Tom; the presentation of Eliza, a wonderful wife and mother, as a potential “fancy girl” to be sold at auction; the exoticness and beauty of little Harry sold to become a delightful clown in some affluent white person’s home; all these events awaken readers to the monstrosity of slavery. The humanization of the freaks comes when the reader sees himself, his family, his sons, daughters, friends *as* the dehumanized characters in the text—it is then that the others become the self. Schmidt in “From Demon Possession to Magic Show” discusses how a healthy skepticism of ventriloquism and other showman techniques enabled Enlightenment Americans to rightly question “voices” they heard: “The new ventriloquism of the late eighteenth century imagined the final erasure of demons and spirits and their replacement by a profusion of naturalized voices, stark images of divided, multiple, or counterfeited selves” (302). Stowe’s voice is heard above other projected voices. Her utilization of freaks allows readers to see themselves in the freak’s place as “counterfeited selves,” and this enables Stowe to enlighten her audience because readers personalize the slave atrocities and retain a healthy skepticism for other voices which claim slavery is the natural, even Biblical, course of things.

The narrator’s description of little Harry’s beauty borders on titillation:

There was something in his appearance remarkably beautiful and engaging. His black hair, fine as floss silk, hung in glossy curls about his round dimpled face, while a pair of large dark eyes, full of fire and softness, looked out from beneath the rich, long lashes, as he peered curiously into the apartment. A gay robe of scarlet and yellow plaid, carefully made and neatly fitted, set off to advantage the dark and rich style of his beauty; and a certain comic air of assurance, blended with bashfulness, showed that he had been not unused to being petted and noticed by his master. (13)

It is with different eyes that the slave child is viewed as a desirable, saleable object. Harry's "being petted" by Mr. Shelby draws Mr. Haley's attention, and the gentlemen laugh at Harry's "wild, grotesque songs." And as Mr. Haley says when questioned by George Shelby about his profession as slave trader: "So long as your grand folks wants to buy men and women, I'm as good as they is," said Haley; "'t an't any meaner sellin' on 'em, than 't is buyin'!" (116). Haley knows the owner who sells slaves is just as culpable as the trader who auctions them off. P.T. Barnum too was known to scour the world for interesting curiosities with whom he could traffic and profit, and he too had his eyes open for beauties to enchant his patrons.

Haley cold-heartedly sells a slave woman's baby when the boat on which they are traveling stops at Louisville. This sale involves another attractive baby boy. The woman is so distraught after losing her beautiful little boy that she jumps off the boat and kills herself. Uncle Tom feels the woman sweep by him at midnight. When Haley comes to look for the slave mother in the morning Stowe describes Haley as seeking his "live-stock." Part of the enfreakment process is to have readers perceive slaves as animalistic, unfeeling others. One would have to be inhuman to quietly endure the loss of a child. Several slave traders discuss the issue of slave women being attached to their children and come to the conclusion: "If we could

get a breed of gals that did n't care, now, for their young uns,' said Marks; 'tell ye, I think 't would be bout the greatest mod'rn improvement I knows on'" (77). The traders know that family bonds within the slave community are just as strong if not stronger than white family bonds. A woman on the boat with Tom and Haley says to another woman who insists slaves have no feelings: "Indeed, ma'am, you can know nothing of them, if you say so,' answered the first lady, warmly. 'I was born and brought up among them. I know they *do* feel, just as keenly—even more so, perhaps—as we do'" (138). It is to the traders' advantage to ignore this fact, as the laws of the land ignore it. O'Loughlin explains that even a pro-slavery writer like Mary Eastman who in 1852 penned a rebuttal to Stowe's novel entitled *Aunt Phillis's Cabin; or, Southern Life As It Is* cannot deny that slaves feel deeply when their family is dismembered and sold off. A white mistress comments in *Aunt Phillis's Cabin* about the separation of a slave mother from her children: "This is the first time Lucy . . . that I have ever known children to be sold away from their mother, and I look upon the crime with as great a horror as you do" (*APC* 44).¹⁹⁸ Mary Eastman, a proslavery advocate, empathizes with the heartbroken slave mother. The crimes against slave families at this time period were well known to pro-slavery advocates as well as abolitionists. Stowe has Haley present slaves and construct slave narratives staging them as unfeeling freaks, in order to expose the myth that slaves are unfeeling.

The "live-stock" Haley is seeking when he looks for Lucy (who has committed suicide because her son was sold) did not just consist of black slaves. George, like his wife Eliza, also

¹⁹⁸ Jim O'Loughlin, "Articulating *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," *New Literary History* 31.3 (2000): 573-597. "It is not, however, the first time Eastman had heard such a story, as Stowe herself tells of another Lucy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Stowe's Lucy is on board the boat going down river with Tom. Sold without her knowledge by her master (who is also the father of her child), Lucy has her child taken from her and sold while she is sleeping. This Lucy throws herself off the side of the boat and drowns, unlike Lucy of Eastman's novel who is embraced by her owner" (591).

passes for white. In the saloon the company of men rise to read a wanted poster for an escaped slave. The escaped slave is the mulatto George:

Ran away from the subscriber, my mulatto boy, George. Said George six feet in height, a very light mulatto, brown curly hair; is very intelligent, speaks handsomely, can read and write; will probably try to pass for a white man: is deeply scarred on his back and shoulders; has been branded in his right hand with the letter H. 'I will give four hundred dollars for him alive, and the same sum for satisfactory proof that he has been killed.'

(120)

It is clear why George is so intimidating: he can pass as an educated white man and he does. He blurs the boundary lines between white, powerful master and powerless subservient slave. The fact that he is more intelligent than his master is also threatening, as is made clear by George's numerous back scars. His master whips him in an attempt to make him submissive. George says: "Mas'r will find out that I'm one that whipping won't tame" (28). The low sum offered for George (dead or alive) shows his master's contempt for George's amazing business abilities. What really annoys George's master is that George knows he is superior, regardless of whether or not he is a slave: "I'm a better man than he is. I know more about business than he does; I am a better manager than he is; I can read better than he can; I can write a better hand . . ." (26). Later on when George, traveling as a white man, arrives at the tavern, he reads his own bill of sale or wanted poster—it is an advertisement for a slave flogging, and George peruses it disguised as an indifferent white man. In *On Longing* Stewart explains that giants and other freaks ". . . were put on display in public taverns, and notices posted in local papers or handbills served to advertise them" (108). When George Harris arrives at the inn where his poster advertises him, he comes in a dignified buggy with a black servant driving him: "It had a genteel

appearance, and a well-dressed, gentlemanly man sat on the seat, with a colored servant driving” (121). Part of George’s disguise is to have a slave drive his buggy—he thereby masks his otherness with a performance as a white man. The slave wanted poster proceeds George’s arrival. P.T Barnum similarly had posters printed up announcing his anticipated arrival and piqued viewers’ interest. One such poster was printed with no name just the inscription: “I Am Coming.”¹⁹⁹ The poster did not have Barnum’s name, just his image, assuming that everyone everywhere knew him. George is not a typical slave and even when he reads his wanted poster detailing his physical description no one in the room recognizes him as the run away slave; the post bill proceeds him, but he is not a stereotypical runaway slave. George is very light skinned, educated, cultured, intelligent, married to a loving woman and a dedicated family man. This is not the typical, expected description of a runaway slave in antebellum America. Stowe’s novel indicts stereotypes and crushes time-honored myths about slaves. Of course Eliza, George and Harry comprise a loving family unit deserving respect. George says: “Oh, Eliza, if these people only knew what a blessing it is for a man to feel that his wife and child belong to *him!*” (204). George is content having his wife and child with him when just a few days before he thought he would never see them again. Although society and slave traders publicly professed that slaves had no family feelings, Stowe exposes the myth as an expediency adopted to assuage traders’ and masters’ consciences (if they had any).

The Harris family is not journeying alone; Jim and his mother are traveling with George, Eliza and Harry in the hope of obtaining their freedom. When the slave traders corner them, they

¹⁹⁹ P.T. Barnum, “I Am Coming.” 1875/1879 Framed poster with woodcut illustrations, printed in two colors. Inset portrait of P.T. Barnum engraved by Mayes. Hertzberg Circus Collection of the Witte Museum, San Antonio Texas. Circus and the City: New York, 1793-2010 <http://www.bgc.bard.edu/gallery/gallery-at-bgc/main-gallery.html> <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/21/nyregion/circus-and-the-city-at-bard-graduate-center-galleries.html?smid=pl-share>

hear a speech from George stating that he will defend himself and his family from harm. The slave traders comment that they are “officers of justice,” which is true because the law is on their side. George discusses the *justice* they intend to enact on the runaways: “You mean to take my wife to sell in New Orleans, and put my boy like a calf in a trader’s pen, and send Jim’s old mother to the brute that whipped and abused her before, because he couldn’t abuse her son. You want to send Jim and me back to be whipped and tortured, and ground down under the heels of them that you call masters . . .” (215). The Quakers are helping Jim save his mother from unspeakable abuse; they are helping a father protect his wife and son from being sold like animals. In helping these runaway slaves, the Quakers are breaking the law, but they answer to a higher authority, God. George says: “. . .we stand here as free, under God’s sky, as you are . . .” (215), and he means it. He will defend his friends and family just as any other protective father and friend would. In *Mightier than the Sword*, Reynolds explains: “Stowe was the leading popularizer of higher law—held by those who looked beyond the Constitution or the Fugitive Slave Law to the law of natural justice, supported by God and morality . . . considered more sacred than any human statute” (118). When George is communicating with the slave hunters, he tells them in no uncertain terms that he is following a higher law in protecting his friends and family, and is a mouthpiece for Stowe’s rejection of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Sarah Elbert describes the infamous law which required the return from the north of fugitive slaves: “No single event more deeply stirred anti-slavery activists in the United States and the British Isles than the passage of the American Fugitive Slave Law in 1850. Northern white citizens were outraged by the Federal requirement that they aid in the return of escaped slaves to their southern masters or face fines and imprisonment” (17). Stowe’s outrage is echoed in George Harris’s dialogue with his hunters.

The slave poster advertising George Harris (dead or alive) encapsulates visual expositions of the time. In a time when seemingly everything was examined, babies became interesting specimens. In 1855 Barnum's American Museum held a baby show wherein babies were exhibited. The baby show posters enticed people to come view the "finest baby," the "fattest baby," the "finest twins," and are similar to the posters which encouraged readers to look out for runaway slaves. Come view these people on display and pass judgment. P.T. Barnum had posters entitled: "The Four Albino Negro Boys!" In 1844 Barnum enticed readers to come and see the "Novel Concert By The Four Snow White Negro Boys!" and his poster ensures: "The public are respectfully assured, these Entertainments will be conducted with the strictest attention to propriety and decorum, and that nothing that has the slightest tendency to immorality will be permitted. . ." ²⁰⁰ The assumption being there is nothing immoral about displaying black slaves who appear white. These "white" slaves are touted in the poster as "truly wonderful freaks of nature," so the connection to George's, Eliza's and even little Harry's freak status cannot be doubted—blacks who can comfortably perform as whites are deemed "wonderful freaks" in antebellum America. As Melish in "The 'Condition' Debate and Racial Discourse in the Antebellum North" explains: "White negroes were, after all, negroes, not evidence of transformation but mere freaks; republican whiteness would finally triumph over the sun and enslavement" (657). George, Eliza and Harry are presented as white negroes. The spectacle of presenting for inspection people, freaks, babies at this time ties in with the public parade and expositions, which attempted to ensure and solidify notions of normalcy.

²⁰⁰ "Novel concert by the Four Snow White Negro Boys! The Four Albino Negro Boys!" Boston, 1844 American Antiquarian Society Worcester, MA
<http://catalog.mwa.org/vwebv/holdingsInfo?searchId=543&recCount=10&recPointer=0&bibId=210013>

The sideshow's performance is influenced by the audience, as is evident from an exhibition of General Tom Thumb in London. In Barnum's letter dated July 21, 1844 he speaks of amalgamation and the comfort with which London ladies associate with negro men. Barnum and General Tom Thumb, generously exporting their racism, harass a couple who came to see the General. To Tom Thumb, the racially mixed couple was more of a freak show than he was: "A negro came into the General's exhibition the other night with a well dressed white woman on his arm . . . I made General Tom Thumb sing all the 'nigger songs' that he could think of . . . The amalgamating darkey did not like this allusion to his 'brack bredren ob de south. . .'" (*The Colossal P.T. Barnum Reader* 69). Later in life Barnum attempted to separate himself from lowbrow exhibitions and elevate his standards so that men, women, and children of all ages could comfortably attend his exhibitions; this early letter shows his crass beginnings, as this performance in London surely was not just offensive to the harassed couple and is tellingly indicative of Barnum's uncensored feelings about miscegenation. Barnum, in *The Colossal P.T. Barnum Reader* discusses how "He also purchased a negro in Vicksburg to attend him as servant" (114), and then relates how the servant stole money, so Barnum ". . . gave him fifty lashes, and took him to New Orleans, where he was sold at auction" (114). P.T. Barnum, a man born in Connecticut, the consummate Yankee entrepreneur, purchases a slave, whips him because he believes the slave has stolen money from him, and then takes the slave to be sold in New Orleans. Barnum staged Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in his American Museum, but there is clearly no reason to believe he espoused the novel's abolitionist sentiment. Instead, he may be more in line with Ellen Goldner's ideas about Stowe in "Arguing With Pictures," wherein Goldner shows how Stowe's scenes paint pictures that simultaneously support white abolitionist ideas about racial superiority, while promoting racial equality through various scenes wherein

pictures of Topsy and Eva are imprinted on readers' minds. Barnum realizes what sells, and promotes Stowe's abolitionist play because of the remunerative value the play affords him through its ticket sales. Interestingly, the self-promoting Barnum describes himself as "... a friend of equal rights" (*The Colossal P.T. Barnum Reader* 115). This presumably means that Barnum equally mistreats everyone and in the process turns a profit.

Uncle Tom's Cabin along with exposing cruelty to slaves, shows racial mixing in a sublime manner. Uncle Tom and Aunt Chloe love the Shelby children, especially George Shelby who is almost always present at their cabin. Uncle Tom and Eva read the Bible, discuss God, religion and other issues in a reciprocally respectful manner, even if they are both presented as children. Eliza Harris and Mrs. Bird discuss the impact of losing a child. Eva, the quintessential white angel, wants to take her mother's prized necklace, (worth a small fortune) cash it in, purchase land, and ensure that all the slaves on the plantation have their own place where a school will be erected so that they can learn to read their Bibles. Rachel Halliday and the Quakers treat Eliza, Harry and George like family welcoming them at their dinner table. It is the first time George feels on equal footing with white men, and he comes to understand the true definition of home: "It was the first time ever George had sat down on equal terms at any white man's table; and he sat down, at first, with some constraint and awkwardness; but they all exhaled and went off like fog... This, indeed was a home . . ." (156). Stowe sees the mixing of races as something natural, religious and elevating. Stowe was appalled by stories she heard detailing the rape of female slaves by their masters, and she ensures that Cassy and Emmeline will not suffer that fate at the end of the novel; Tom gives his life to protect the women.

Striking images in the text enhance readers' visual responses, and Barnum's posters and Stowe's posters (within her text) perform the same cultural work—advertising a noteworthy

didactic spectacle. This spectacle allures readers with the promise of a good show. The freak show advertised is the investigation of miscegenation: come and see the black white people or the white slaves. Or come see the abused slaves; come see the white child and the humble slave reading the Bible together. Stowe's images are memorable. In a world where to be black or white means the difference between being enslaved or free, people who blur the boundaries are presented as freaks worthy of attention and fear because they illustrate weaknesses in the existing power hierarchy—the permeable color line.

In Stowe's novel Haley is an inept reader who slowly reads aloud a newspaper advertisement detailing a slave auction: "Executor's Sale,--Negroes!—Agreeably to order of court, will be sold, on Tuesday, February 20, before the Court-house door, in the town of Washington, Kentucky. . ." (132). Haley attends the auction and purchases a boy separating him from his aging mother. The mother begs Haley to take them both as all of her children have been sold and her son is the last of the lot. She moans: "'Couldn't dey leave me one? Mas'r allers said I should have one,--he did'" (135), but once again the promise a master makes his slave is broken, and a family is destroyed. Haley is similar to Barnum and Barnum's audience, for Haley examines the slave specimens he intends to purchase even looking at their teeth, touching and assessing them to ensure their viability and profitability. Haley examines the slaves for sale: "Haley here forced his way into the group, walked up to the old man, pulled his mouth open and looked in, felt of his teeth, made him stand and straighten himself, bend his back, and perform various evolutions to show his muscles; then he passed on to the next, and put him through the same trial" (133). Just so Barnum has his audiences in various cities through which he travels investigate, touch, question, and interrogate Joice Heth whom he presented as Washington's nurse. He even stages an event for profit wherein medical and newspaper men are allowed to

witness her autopsy and verify her antiquity. Even in death the Joice Heth humbug continued. Barnum charged fifty cents a person to witness the dissection of Joice Heth and seven hundred people paid to see Dr. Rogers dissect George Washington's nurse. Barnum states: "This collection of persons was composed entirely of learned and scientific men, including surgeons, physicians, medical students, lawyers, and clergymen" (*The Colossal P.T. Barnum Reader* 49), and shortly after the men gathered Dr. Rogers showed up with eight to ten knives to cut up Joice Heth (*The Colossal P.T. Barnum Reader* 49). It is not unlike instruments of torture used on slaves like George Harris or Topsy, whose backs are horribly scarred. Yes, Heth is dead and cannot feel the knives cut into her skin, but the fact that 700 people come to watch an old woman's dissection for "scientific purposes" is worth noting because the same audience would not be allowed, under any pretense, to witness a white woman's dissection. Balleisen explains: "And in an age when medical school autopsies of dead whites frequently prompted riots, Heth's public dismemberment followed on a chorus of demands by the press and the wider white public, who loudly agitated for medical assessment of her actual age" (397). It is Heth's status as other, which allows her to be treated in such a callous, gruesome manner and Heth's treatment sets the stage for Stowe's enfreakment of characters in her novel which presents the public dissection of the slavery issue. Greenberg explains the components of southern honor and the strict laws, which were enacted to humiliate and dishonor duelers' bodies in an attempt to curtail dueling. One of the most ignominious punishments allotted duelers was that "The body could be delivered to 'any surgeon or surgeons to be dissected and anatomized'" (67), which is what Barnum does to Heth's body for profit. She has not broken any law, yet Heth is dishonored in every way possible; but then again it is not news that whites and "others" were treated differently in antebellum America. An 1835-1836 Barnum poster of Joice Heth described her as "The

Greatest Natural & National CURIOSITY In the World.”²⁰¹ What else could Barnum do when she died except satisfy the world’s curiosity by publically dissecting her? He even ensures that the autopsy results remain inconclusive in the public’s mind. The spectacle of Joice Heth ties in to parades utilized to define who we are as a nation, and who we are not.

In an attempt to explain Barnum’s character, Cook in *The Colossal P.T. Barnum Reader* confesses: “. . . when Barnum comes upon something truly remarkable, his standard response is to purchase the novelty and ship it home, thereby transforming his travel letters into advance promotions” (59). Of course many of the truly remarkable *some things* Barnum comes across are people; when he can he purchases them, stages them as freaks, invents a narrative of their otherness and exhibits them for profit, just as Haley presents his freak slaves for profit. Just so, George Harris’s poster promotes his capture or killing for profit and Harris’s poster warns that he may try to pass for a white man. Barnum’s baby contests, in a similar vein, present babies worthy of attention, and award prizes at the end of the spectacle. The staged events validate those we admire and those whom we categorize as others.

Interestingly, Stowe adapted *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* for the stage exclusively to be read (in lecture/monologue form) by actress Mary Webb. This adaptation entitled *The Christian Slave* enables Mary Webb, a black woman, to read a condensed version of the play and add her voice, presence, and ethnic experience to the stage version of the novel. Eric Gardner discusses the enlarged role of Cassy in *this* adaptation and concludes that Stowe’s views on slavery “. . . were much more complex and shifting. . .” (83). Unlike the novel, this version has Cassy end the play

²⁰¹ Somers Historical Society. “In late 1835 and the first weeks of 1836, Americans in cities and towns across the northeast might have seen this poster advertising the exhibit of Joice Heth, an elderly African-American woman. . . Unlike Barnum’s later human exhibits, who were photographed fairly often, this is one of only two images of Heth that remain.” <http://chnm.gmu.edu/lostmuseum/lm/100/>

in anger and outrage over her treatment and the way slavery destroys Christian values and obliterated her dreams of domestic bliss. Cassy is the character in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* who kills her newborn son rather than have him sold into slavery; Cassy lost her two other beloved children when they were sold. Cassy, we come to find out, is Eliza Harris's mother. Gardner points out the similarities between the fictional Cassy in Stowe's novel and the actress Mary Webb whose mother was an escaped slave. This is an interesting event in that Stowe, who refused other requests to sanction a stage version of her novel, acquiesced and allowed Webb to read her play; the act of reading was performance and spectacle itself as Mary Webb's voice and race add validity to the play.

Eliza, George and Harry are staged as children in the novel as were all slaves in nineteenth century America. As Dayan in "Amorous Bondage" explains: "The patriarchal defense of the intimate relation between master and slave found itself coordinate with the insistence on the subordination of women" (241). Discussions took place as to whether or not slaves, who were acculturated to a warm climate, could thrive in the north where it is colder. Slaves were described as needing superior masters to look after them because all slaves were children, and all masters were paternal. Stowe's narrator states: "The Negro, it must be remembered, is an exotic of the most gorgeous and superb countries of the world, and he has deep in his heart, a passion for all that is splendid, rich, and fanciful; a passion which rudely indulged by an untrained taste, draws on them the ridicule of the colder and more correct white race" (180). In a similar vein Stowe's narrator states: "Now, there is no more use in making believe to be angry with a Negro than with a child . . ." (86). In *Uncle Tom's Cabin* children and all slaves are one category; they need white adult guidance. However, St. Clare says regarding Eva: "Your little child is your only true democrat" (196), and Eva is shown treating her slaves

the same way she treats her mother and father—she is equally loving. If the north and south were as childish as Eva is, there would be no slavery and no need for a bloody civil war to end slavery; if all adults were as simplistically childish about the Bible, and honest and trustworthy as Uncle Tom is, certainly the world would be a much better place. To be relegated to the realm of childhood is not a negative here. Children are democratic and color blind—they see what is on the inside of a person, not what color the person is. Stowe makes this clear when St. Clare tells Tom that he has begun the paperwork to make Tom a free man. Tom does not respond like a passive, scared child in need of guidance; Tom rejoices at the exciting opportunity freedom will afford him. St. Clare is a little insulted with Tom’s jubilation because he believes Tom is better off as a slave; Tom has enough food and good clothing and the protection of his master and he will not have those things once he is granted his freedom. Tom says: “‘Knows all that, Mas’r St. Clare; Mas’r’s been too good; but, Mas’r, I’d rather have poor clothes, poor house, poor everything, and have them *mine*, than have the best, and have ‘em any man’s else,—I had *so*, Mas’r’ I think it’s natur, Mas’r’” (329). Tom wants his independence as a man. He wants his own house, his own clothes, and he wants to live his own life. Tom says this to St. Clare speaking man to man; he is jubilant that St. Clare has taken the first steps toward freeing him. The slave master hierarchy is flipped when St. Clare, dying of his stab wound, asks Tom to hold his hand and pray. Tom is like a paternal preacher praying and comforting his master. When St. Clare dies, he is described as a child. “The sinking paleness of death fell on him; but with it there fell, as if shed from the wings of some pitying spirit, a beautiful expression of peace, like that of a wearied child who sleeps” (341-2). Surely there is something wonderful about childish naiveté, which can ensure equality. St. Clare the “wearied child” goes home to heaven and calls

out “Mother,” as he dies. He never does the paternally responsible thing, however; he never frees his slaves.

Stowe has been criticized for her paternalistic views of slaves which Gardiner explains is present in the first two acts of the sanctioned play *The Christian Slave*, but is absent and radically different in the third act where Cassy’s anger is allowed full reign. “But if the first two acts show Stowe’s continuing use of sentimental racialist paternalism, the third act radically undercuts this ideology” (82). Gardner suggests with Mary Webb’s reading of the play, the message of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is transformed by the actress’s embodiment of the world of the work. Who better to perform the play than a black woman?

Much of Stowe’s novel appeals to women to exert power over their husbands in the matter of slavery, as is seen when Mrs. Bird speaks to Senator Bird about the Fugitive Slave Act. She knows that he would help a runaway slave regardless of how he voted on the issue, should one come knocking at his door. In fact, shortly after their discussion Eliza and Harry come to the door, and Senator Bird, who supported the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, is instrumental in ensuring Eliza’s and Harry’s safe escape from the slave hunters. In *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in the chapter entitled: “In Which It Appears That a Senator Is But a Man,” Stowe shows the readers that the diminutive Mrs. Bird has substantial power in influencing her husband and prodding the senator to follow his conscience and aid poor, helpless runaway slaves. Mary Webb’s gender and ethnicity, which in antebellum America are perceived weaknesses, empower and add substantial weight to Stowe’s words.

Frost explains: “Americanness . . . depends on a cultural motif of human coloration that projects an image of a blackened other that is either evil or infantile and forever in the shadow,

or at the throat of the white civilizer” (x). Civilizer here may be synonymous with enslaver. Topsy, Harry, George and Eliza are all staged as children in need of guidance at various times in the text. Eliza’s is described as freakishly empowered when she crosses the ice and George is criticized for being wild and assuming a white man’s demeanor and clothing to escape bondage. But George defends himself with a gun and gives a powerful speech explaining why America is not his country. Wild and infantile might be a euphemism for fearless. Harry is described as being wildly exotic. They are all freakish wild children who accomplish amazing tasks, beat the odds, break the chains, and escape. Topsy is the wildest freak in the novel, and she has much in common with the other freaks in Stowe’s work. Topsy’s transformation is grounded in the domestic sphere, whereas Eliza, George and Harry physically escape America’s racial boundaries, Topsy journeys from being the wildest freak, to the tamest, because of little Eva’s love and Ophelia’s civilizing.

Aiken’s unsanctioned staging of the play version of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was famous, and depictions of Topsy are infamous and memorable in these widely seen stage adaptations of Stowe’s novel. One character Aiken added to the line up was Gumption Cute who famously talked of presenting Topsy as Barnum presented freaks. Reynolds explains: “He [Gumption Cute] talks comically about becoming a Barnumesque showman and exhibiting Topsy as a ‘woolly gal,’ just as Barnum had exhibited a Woolly Horse” (*Mightier than the Sword* 141). In this most watched play, which staged a novel read around the world, Topsy is the freak at the center of much humor and heartache. As Ellen Goldner explains: “Topsy, in her first appearance in Stowe’s novel, as well as in theater productions and lithographs based on it in the 1850s, performed the role of the Other as property . . .” (74). Yet, Topsy is much more than

property and remains an enigmatic character worth sounding because she is much deeper than she at first appears.

Henry James did not distinguish between the novel and stage versions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in regards to aesthetic differences as he “. . . seemed not to find any significant ones between the novel and the plays, but rather positioned them as acting in concert. The young James was entranced by the almost indescribable feelings and practices brought about by the book together with dramatic adaptations” (O'Loughlin 573). Topsy's role in the novel and her marvelous stage performances were an unforgettable event in antebellum America as James's fond memories attest. The Topsy character was doubled in many stage versions, because presumably two Topsy's were more entertaining than one. It is interesting to note that in 1872 when Stowe lectured in New England on her works, the chapters of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that she almost always read from were the Topsy chapters (Trautmann 280). Just as audiences enjoyed reading and seeing Topsy perform, Stowe herself included Topsy readings as a humorous and intriguing part of her *Uncle Tom's Cabin* lecture circuit. Stowe's Topsy is an unforgettable character: “When recommending to Charles Milnes Gaskell passages from American literature that would hold an audience, Henry Adams included ‘Mrs. Stowe's scenes with Topsy’ as ‘about as good as anything she has done’” (Trautmann 281). Of all the characters Stowe created, Topsy stands out the most.

Topsy has much in common with Eliza, Harry, George and other slaves in the novel. She too has been abused and sold to the highest bidder. She too is presented as a freak not because of her ability to pass as white, in fact she is very black, but because of her incorrigible behavior. Topsy has been beaten, and even the other slaves in the home do not want her there because she is coarse and low. Mr. St. Clare purchases Topsy as part of an educational experiment. He

wants his cousin Ophelia, who is from the North, to have a hand in raising and Christianizing the crass, lawless, goblin of a girl. St. Clare says to Ophelia:

“I’ve made a purchase for your department,--see here,” said St. Clare; and, with the word, he pulled along a little negro girl, about eight or nine years of age.

She was one of the blackest of her race; and her round shining eyes, glittering as glass beads, moved with quick and restless glances over everything in the room. Her mouth, half open with astonishment at the wonders of the new Mas’r’s parlor, displayed a white and brilliant set of teeth. Her wooly hair was braided in sundry little tails, which stuck out in every direction. . . She was dressed in a single filthy, ragged garment, made of bagging . . . Altogether, there was something odd and goblin-like about her appearance. . . . (258)

Similar to Mr. Shelby’s presentation of Harry to the slave trader Haley earlier in the novel, St. Clare presents Ophelia with Topsy and wants to witness his cousin teach and perform a one woman magical feat wherein she educates, domesticates, and Christianizes Topsy thereby in microcosm solves the slavery problem. St. Clare does save Topsy from physical abuse at the hands of her cruel master, but he so enjoys her minstrel antics, mispronunciations and misunderstandings of Ophelia’s Biblical teachings. It is as if he purchases Topsy to entertain himself and vex Miss Ophelia with the slavery issue. St. Clare loves to laugh at Topsy and at his cousin’s failure to solve (even on a small scale) the slavery question, namely: what do we do with slaves like Topsy? What happens when slaves are freed? It is worth noting that Topsy is exceptionally bright when learning how to read and write; it is the domesticity of sitting and sewing that she rejects. She refuses to be a specimen enclosed in a museum case. Topsy is too

full of life to allow herself to become an imprisoned waxed figure striking a pose in the corner of her own life. Topsy rejects the concept of becoming an angel in the house; she much prefers to bedevil the house and just about everyone in it.

Topsy is described as a doll with her “glass beads” eyes and wooly head. Bernstein in *Racial Innocence* has written about the famous Topsy/Turvy doll which became the Topsy-Eva doll. The doll is one doll, which could be flipped upside down to reveal a white Eva or flipped back to reveal a black Topsy. “After the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, topsy-turvy dolls absorbed the Topsy/Eva relationship and often acquired the name ‘Topsy-Eva’ dolls. . .” (Bernstein 169). Bernstein explains that the black rubber doll representing Topsy was meant to be abused: “. . .Topsy and doll are equalized as insensate things” (219). A similar vein is followed with Joice Heth when Barnum started the rumor that Heth was not human but made of Indian Rubber (Balleisen 397), which prompted a jump in attendance at Barnum’s Museum, as people came to look at, touch and investigate whether or not Heth was in fact human. However the opposite is true with the white part of the Topsy-Eva doll; when it is flipped over the white, angelic Eva doll is meant to be carefully handled. “The emblematic angel-child was, as many scholars have noted, Stowe’s Little Eva” (848), Bernstein explains. What does the reader learn through the Christianization of Topsy in Stowe’s novel? The reader learns how to address the slavery issue head on.

Ryan in *Empire of the Mother* explains an 1845 publication of the *Mother’s Assistant and Young Lady’s Friend*, a periodical published in Boston, wherein matters such as the importance of domestic literature on the formation of women’s minds is discussed. *Mother’s Assistant* stated, “We conclude, then, that female literature has a special office to fill. Its peculiar task is to address the female mind and mold its character. The time has arrived when literature is to be

held responsible to a considerable extent, for the morality of the world” (33). St. Clare brings Topsy home so that Miss Ophelia can Christianize, tame, and make her a contributing member of society. It is a woman’s task to take this wild child freak in hand and educate her. It just so happens that Little Eva almost effortlessly accomplishes the job with her love and understanding of Topsy. Stowe has the readers see what a female can accomplish with love, understanding and effort. Mrs. Bird’s assessment of the runaway slave issues trumps Senator’s Bird’s vote. She, the woman in the house, ensures that Eliza and Harry will not be turned away, but fed, clothed and given the aid they require to successfully elude the slave hunters pursuing them. Mrs. Bird clothes Eliza’s son Harry with her own deceased child’s clothing. Although men like St. Clare and Senator Bird are the ones wielding patriarchal power, Eva, Miss Ophelia, Mrs. Bird and Rachel Halladay are “. . . held responsible to a considerable extent, for the morality of the world,” and admirably rise to the occasion. Topsy’s story shows the reading world that the key to abolishing slavery is through kindness, understanding and education, not through whipping and torture. Topsy eventually becomes a teacher of children in Africa. She is tamed and becomes a contributing member of society. At the beginning of the novel she is described as a goblin and gives outrageous, but true answers to the questions put to her as the following examples illustrate:

“Never was born!” persisted Topsy, with another grin, that looked so goblin-like, that if Miss Ophelia had been at all nervous, she might have fancied that she had got hold of some sooty gnome from the land of Diablerie; but Miss Ophelia was not nervous, but plain and business-like, and she said, with some sternness,--“You mustn’t answer me in that way, child; I’m not playing with you. Tell me where you were born, and who your father and mother were.”

“Never was born,” reiterated the creature, more emphatically; “never had no father nor mother, nor nothing.”

“Do you know who made you?”

“Nobody, as I knows on,” said the child, with a short laugh.

“I spects I grow’d. Don’t think nobody never made me.” (261-2)

Topsy is described as a goblin, a sooty gnome, a creature, and she states that she does not know where she was born, how old she is, who her parents are or who God is. She echoes Pearl’s answers to similar questions in *The Scarlet Letter*. Topsy is presented as an other, not just to the readers, but to the other slaves who do not want her around because she is so coarse. Topsy is a curiosity in the house. Little Eva and Ophelia are equal to the task that St. Clare cannot accomplish himself: civilizing Topsy. Topsy’s former master has been beating her as the Topsy/Eva doll encourages children who purchase the doll to do. The Eva part of the doll is cherished, the Topsy part of the doll is freakishly beaten.

The difficult job the female gender is presented with in terms of healing slavery’s wounds is not an easy one to accomplish. Mrs. St. Clare fails in her calling as she has no positive impact on Topsy or any other slave; it is Miss Ophelia, Little Eva, Mrs. Bird, the Quaker women and other women who answer to a higher law and get the job done. Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is sentimental literature and Tompkins in *Sensational Designs* explains what the word sentimental means in nineteenth century literature: “. . .what the word *sentimental* really means in this context is that the arena of human action, as in the Tract Society directions, has been defined not as the world but as the human soul” (151). Many of the heart wrenching moments in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* happen around hearths and involve the wrenching of the human soul in the domestic sphere. Aunt Chloe says goodbye to her husband Uncle Tom, whom she

never sees again. George Harris says goodbye to his wife Eliza because he has to run away and believes he will never see his wife and son again. Mrs. Bird convinces her husband that the Fugitive Slave Act is inhuman and that it is right and Biblical to aid poor, helpless runaway slaves. Eva dies in the home with her cherished slaves around her. All these events occur in the home. The power of the domestic sphere trumps what is professed in the public realm.

With Topsy, it is easy to believe she is a soulless imp, but through the journey Miss Ophelia and Eva show Topsy that she is loved. They illustrate that Topsy has a soul, is capable of loving and being loved and this work of domestic literature stages a freak and shows the freak is just like everyone else who is an outsider of some group; freaks, like the rest of us have a story to tell and a lesson to teach. Barnum constructed narratives for his freaks to entertain and educate his audience, and Stowe constructs Topsy's narrative to educate, entertain, and elevate readers through Topsy's humanization. *Gumption Cute*, in the stage version of Stowe's novel, presented Topsy as a woolly gal worthy of attention because of her outrageous behavior and goblin status; Stowe piques the readers' interest with Topsy's aberrant behavior, but pushes the freak child towards an epiphany which she experiences through Eva's love. Topsy's character metamorphoses from an ugly amusing creature to a beautifully sensitive woman transformed by love. Stowe's message for the reader is a similar one. Through the spectacle of Topsy we internalize the specter of slavery; through the tearful death of Eva who dies to save others, the reader is awakened by a clarion call to abolish slavery.

St. Clare and Ophelia are called because of a fight between Rosa and Topsy, which takes place after Eva's death. Rosa accuses Topsy of hiding something and assumes Topsy has stolen what she is protecting. Ophelia empties the contents of a sock Topsy had been keeping close to her heart. In the sock there is a small book of scripture with a Biblical verse for each day of the

year (a present to Topsy from Eva) and one of Eva's precious curls. It is clear that Topsy has been transformed by Eva's tenderness and is keeping Eva's cherished gifts close to her heart. St. Clare and Ophelia are touched by Topsy's behavior. St. Clare allows Topsy to keep the gifts and he says to Miss Ophelia: "I really think you can make something of that concern. . . Any mind that is capable of *real sorrow* is capable of good. You must try and do something with her" (331). Much has been written about readers' reactions to Stowe's novel and how it opened the floodgates of tears and enabled readers to rethink the slavery issue. Stowe is saying that any reader " . . . that is capable of *real sorrow* is capable of good..." (331). In other words, readers' goodness is necessary in order to abolish slavery."

Miss Ophelia the northerner is transformed by her experience with Topsy. As she is transformed, so is the reader. Miss Ophelia is initially described as not wanting slaves around her, but, after Eva's death Ophelia is more kind, gentle and understanding with Topsy. "She [Miss Ophelia] was more diligent in teaching Topsy,--taught her mainly from the Bible,--did not any longer shrink from her touch, or manifest an ill-repressed disgust, because she felt none. She viewed her now through the softened medium that Eva's hand had first held before her eyes, and saw in her only an immortal creature, whom God had sent to be led by her to glory and virtue" (330). If the reader feels real sorrow for Eva's death, he/she must go forward, as Miss Ophelia does, and do the work of making slaves' lives better by abolishing slavery. Let's not forget that "The novel, which stimulated the sale of Bibles globally, was also used as a Sunday school text" (43).²⁰² The didactic message of the novel should be clear: slavery is evil; it destroys families and is destroying the country. Goldner explains that Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* unified much

²⁰² David S. Reynolds, *Mightier Than the Sword* "Not only did the novel spur the sale of Bibles throughout the world, but it was widely seen as a new Bible, with its ideal expression of religion for the era. It offered a religion of love to all—blacks and whites, the enslaved and the free, the poor and the rich, children as well as adults" (1).

of the reading nation against slavery: “Together Stowe's novel, especially its pictures and the early popular culture associated with them, helped to constitute an imagined ‘national’ community of abolitionists” (72).²⁰³ This national abolitionist community would abolish slavery with much credit going to Stowe herself.

Stowe, along with other literary luminaries, were attending a concert in Boston when news spread that Lincoln had signed the historic Emancipation Proclamation. The news caused the elated crowd of concert-goers to erupt in applause. They applauded Lincoln for his heroic actions, and they cheered Harriet Beecher Stowe because her novel was seen as a watershed text documenting the evils of slavery in the United States.²⁰⁴ As Albert von Frank states in his review of Lee’s *Slavery, Philosophy, and American Literature*: “Good and interesting writers engage their world’s problems with inevitably imperfect assumptions the near coherence of which will have something like the shape of philosophy” (378). Stowe’s imperfect philosophy was to appeal to the goodness within; she hoped her text would cause people to look beyond profit to the humanity of the slaves. It did not always work. Stowe also appealed to the women and the power of the domestic sphere and the influence women could have in shaping the patriarchal society through discussions around the hearth. Slavery was a crime which separated families—separated mothers from their children and Stowe’s appeal to American mothers to influence their husbands to stop this horror was a good, if imperfect philosophy. Many events coalesced and caused the war to end slavery.

²⁰³ Ellen J. Goldner, “Arguing With Pictures: Race, Class and the Formation of Popular Abolitionism Through *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.” *Journal of American & Comparative Cultures* 24.1/2 *American History & Life* Web 9 Jan. 2013. “. . . an imagined abolitionist community in the United States linked hundreds of thousands of strangers through the common experience of reading a novel and, in this case, of purchasing and displaying consumer items that produced fetishized ‘image[s] of their communion’” (72).

²⁰⁴ David S. Reynolds, *Mightier Than the Sword* (ix).

In an attempt to utilize everything available to project her message to the largest possible audience, Stowe enlisted Barnum's showmanship techniques. Barnum had a powerful influence on the way Stowe presented Topsy, Harry, George, Eliza and other characters as freaks within the didactic framework of her novel. Stowe articulates her message utilizing the great showman's style; she entertains and simultaneously educates readers about slavery, an important matter about which she had little first hand knowledge. Whereas Barnum's true interest was mercenary, Stowe's true interest was enacting a change in policy through manipulating the country's heartstrings. Northerners after the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act were thrust into slavery first hand, as they were required by law to return any runaway slaves they encountered. Whereas it was impossible to know which slaves had escaped to freedom in the North, each and every slave was subject to examination and possible exportation to the South. Stowe becomes involved in educating readers about the slavery issue and just as Barnum's American Museum presented freak shows and educational exhibits, so does Stowe's novel. As Adams's states: "Framed in a pseudoethnographic language by showmen who called themselves 'doctors' and 'professors,' anthropological exhibits at the freak show often provided American audiences with their primary source of information about the non-Western world" (28). Stowe provides Americans otherwise unfamiliar with the daily life of slavery an eye opening education regarding slavery's treatment of men, women, children, and families. Spectators who visited Barnum's American Museum were expected to engage and question the validity of exhibits; skepticism was healthy and dialogue regarding the veracity and authenticity of spectacles presented was welcomed. Stowe's spectacle of slaves also encouraged national and international dialogue on the slavery issue.

Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* engages in timely debates and allows readers to question the veracity of the nation's narrative regarding the legality of slavery. Do we as a nation answer to a higher law than the federal law? Who is the serpent? Who is the dove? With the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act the north could no longer separate itself from the defining issue facing the nation. North and south were now intertwined in a battle wherein the snake and the dove struggled as in Coleridge's "Christabel," and the destruction of the serpent would take a civil war.

Chapter 5 Freaky Frado: Sideshow Freak and Showman Are One.

On one such occasion, they found her on the roof of the barn. Some repairs having been necessary, a staging had been erected, and was not wholly removed. Availing herself of ladders, she was mounted in high glee on the topmost board. Mr. Belmont called sternly for her to come down; poor Jane nearly fainted from fear. Mrs. B. and Mary did not care if she ‘broke her neck,’ while Jack and the men laughed at her fearlessness. Strange, one spark of playfulness could remain amid such constant toil; but her natural temperament was in a high degree mirthful, and the encouragement she received from Jack and the hired men, constantly nurtured the inclination. (*Our Nig* 30-31).

Harriet E. Wilson’s fictionalized autobiography *Our Nig, or Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, In A Two-Story White House, North. Showing That Slavery’s Shadows Fall Even There*, showcases a silenced section of antebellum America—the free black orphan of the North. Wilson borrows techniques from slave narratives, but make no mistake, her work is unique in that she stages herself as a freak to promote her book. In one way she uses her text to respond to sentimental literature of the day--like Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*--with words and experiences derived from her own life as an economically enslaved mulatto girl of the North. In another way, Wilson’s savvy utilization of P.T. Barnum’s showman’s practices allows intrigued readers to laugh at Frado’s wild, schoolgirl antics and mourn her horrendous abuse. Wilson, known as Harriet E. Adams Wilson, resided in Milford, New Hampshire, a region of the country presumably free from slavery, but still fettered by economic injustice and racism. Wilson is cognizant of slave narratives, pro-slavery novels, and antebellum carnivalesque entertainment and incorporates these into her novel to highlight racism and economic injustice; she becomes her own ringmaster exhibiting herself as a freak.²⁰⁵ More notably for the purposes of this study, Wilson is aware of what is necessary to market her text; she is instructed by P.T. Barnum’s

²⁰⁵ David Dowling, “‘Other and More Terrible Evils’: Anticapitalist Rhetoric in Harriet Wilson’s *Our Nig* and Proslavery Propaganda,” *College Literature* 36.3 (2009): 116-136. “The main rhetorical modes available for a New England mulatta indentured servant like Wilson to discuss the issue of northern racism in antebellum America were the slave narrative, pro-slavery/anti-capitalist writing, and the domestic novel. Significantly, these three genres treated race at the time almost exclusively in terms of the system of organized slavery in the South” (118-119).

methodologies and in a reversal of the way Barnum stages Joice Heth for profit, Wilson stages herself as a freak to attract readers to her text and diddles the middleman out of the freak-promoter equation. Wilson is showman and freak, and profits from her exhibit; she constructs her own narrative thereby empowering herself as author, child freak, and promoter.

Our Nig is a work by a black woman published at a time when black women were perceived as powerless—Wilson gives voice to the northern black woman through Frado, the slave servant. Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote about slavery, which she had little first hand opportunity to witness, and Stowe utilized servants like Frado as David Dowling explains: “. . . Harriet Beecher Stowe’s family exploited the labor of black girls as indentured domestic servants” (123). Stowe’s experience with slavery is secondhand, whereas Harriet E. Wilson wrote about her own experience as an abused servant; Wilson gives a shocking firsthand account of the North’s version of freedom as experienced through a mulatto child’s economic slavery, which is the phobic double of southern slavery. Many of her characters answer Stowe’s text as Chakkalal suggests.²⁰⁶ What is groundbreaking about this work is that it is the first novel written by a black woman about her personal experiences, and that she stages herself as a freak; it is the story of an abandoned girl enslaved in staunch abolitionist territory. Reading Harriet E. Wilson’s text through the lens of the Barnum freak show enables readers to understand just how in touch with nineteenth century showmanship techniques Wilson was while crafting her unique text. As Frost in *Never One Nation* explains: “Like the nation itself, the freak exhibit was a construction, a figure wrapped in cultural myth and story. And freaks were almost always shown within the context of a narrative, a showman relating the story of how they came to be in the

²⁰⁶ Tess Chakkalal, “‘Whimsical Contrasts’: Love and Marriage in *The Minister’s Wooing* and *Our Nig*.” *New England Quarterly* 84.1 (2011): 159-171. “In particular, Wilson’s text. . . has been taken to serve as a black response to white nineteenth-century sentimental fiction, especially Harriet Beecher Stowe’s 1852 novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*” (159).

museum and selling souvenir chapbooks that contained the freak's 'history'" (6). *Our Nig* is Harriet E. Wilson "wrapped in a cultural myth and story." The myth is that in New Hampshire servants are treated much better than southern slaves. The "showman relating the story" is Wilson herself and the chapbook contains the story of Frado the freak whose 'history' Wilson constructs to market her story. Wilson shatters the cultural myth that slavery and racism were solely a southern problem; she proves racism and economic enslavement exist in northern locales where abolitionists proudly construct their antislavery narratives and prognosticate that one day all slaves will be as free and happy as they are in the north. Meanwhile, these same abolitionists abuse their black servants and pay white workers starvation wages. One characteristic of her freakery is that Frado is an abused slave, yet classified as a free child who luckily lives in the north. Frost in *Never One Nation* stresses: "There was, then, no such thing as a 'real freak'; by virtue of their carefully plotted representation, freaks were/are always constructed" (6). Wilson constructs Freaky Frado, so instead of visiting Barnum's Museum salons to view the freak show, one need only open, read, and experience Wilson's "souvenir chapbook" *Our Nig*. One would expect to find an abused slave in the southern states, but the exotic locale Frado inhabits is New Hampshire.

Wilson carefully crafted her autobiographical story to ensure it sold and to this end she begins by explaining her birth and how she came to be left by her white mother, Mag, at the Bellmonts' home. Erickson in "New Books, New Men," discusses George Thompson and George Lippard's astute assessment of what it took to market their books. Erickson states that the writers were influenced by Benjamin Franklin's successful autobiography: "No serious writer in America, and few in England, enjoyed anything like Franklin's success at reaching large audiences" (287). Benjamin Franklin knew, as did Harriet E. Wilson, ". . . that he had to

live off of what he wrote” (Erickson 287). As Wilson’s body was broken at the Bellmonts’ house, she now had to utilize her mind to construct her story, and to live off what she wrote in an attempt to support herself and her son. She had Barnum, the quintessential showman, to model for her how to present a freak for profit. Barnum’s forte was the American Museum, Wilson’s was her novel. Both Barnum and Wilson knew how to cash in on the hungry spectatorship market; nineteenth-century America always had time to engage in spectacle, and always had time to view freaks.

In this chapter Wilson’s Frado will be viewed through the lens of a sideshow freak. Her mistreatment, othering, and presentation will be investigated to show that she meets the criteria of “freak”; which is how Wilson intentionally staged her young self. This work upends sentimental literature, criticizes northern abolitionist hypocrisy, indicts capitalism’s free market promise for black workers, and upstages Barnum’s showmanship—Wilson exhibits herself, no middleman is necessary for this writer—she knows how to perform sideshow freak, ringmaster, and chapbook promoter as well. The pages of this fictionalized autobiography usher readers through various freak show salons as though they were strolling through Barnum’s American Museum; Wilson’s freak show begins and ends with Freaky Frado.

First Salon: Frado, the mulatto freak, encounters the mistress monster

“In hell, as in this world, its vestibule, there are all kinds of characters within its degrees of evil, so that while some demons are of the most terrible wickedness, others are much less depraved, and even far less wicked than many persons in the world” (5).

George Thompson *New-York Life: The Mysteries of Upper-Tendom Revealed*

When Frado is abandoned at the Bellmonts, she is heartbroken and no attempt is made by the family to coddle or comfort her. She is immediately put to work doing both indoor and outdoor labor. There is no reason to believe that she will ever be allowed to be anything else but

a hard working child laborer. Mary Bellmont “. . . who had just glided into her teens” (16) says she does not want Frado in their house. Jack, Mary’s brother comments: “‘Keep her,’ said Jack. ‘She’s real handsome and bright, and not very black, either’” (16). Although Frado lives in New Hampshire and is abandoned, she still undergoes the observation one would imagine a slave on the auction block would receive. The family judges Frado and examines her physical attributes with an eye as to how she will perform in the household. Mrs. Bellmont agrees to keep Frado because she wants someone to do all her work and she is interested in training up a servant girl from childhood, so she does not have to change servants so often. Mrs. Bellmont says: “I don’t mind the nigger in the child. I should like a dozen better than one” (16). So at the outset, the family visually assesses the child and discusses ownership of Frado, as if were a slave for sale. Frado comes to the family not just to serve, but to do the work of several adults. She is worn down and abused. Certainly for Frado, the Bellmont house is the “vestibule” of hell wherein she encounters “. . . demons . . . of the most terrible wickedness. . .” through the characters of Mary and Mrs. Bellmont. Lydia Child in *The American Frugal Housewife* explains: “It is a true, and therefore an old remark, that the situation and prospects of a country may be justly estimated by the character of its women; and we all know how hard it is to engraft upon a woman’s character habits and principles to which she was unaccustomed in her girlish days” (91). In other words, Mary’s racist cruelty is bequeathed to her by her mother. In light of Mrs. Bellmont’s and Mary’s behavior, things do not bode well for the “situation and prospects” of the country, as Mrs. Bellmont engenders hatred of Frado in Mary. The Bellmont home is a microcosm of America on the verge of the Civil War as the house contains Frado’s advocates and Frado’s abusers.

It is evident that Mary Bellmont learns to abuse Frado (and presumably any person of color) through following her mother’s example. David Claypoole Johnston’s *The Early*

Development of Southern Chivalry is a powerful mid-nineteenth century graphic depicting two white children in a room “playing” with one black doll tied to a striped chair and another black doll being held by its hair.²⁰⁷ The white boy has a whip in his raised right hand and is ready to strike the bound black doll whose clothing has been drawn down so the whip will connect with the doll’s skin, not its clothing. The white girl is smiling knowingly; in her right hand she holds the other black doll by its hair and with her left hand she points to her black doll. This is a disturbing image of white children’s play in nineteenth century America. Johnston’s title, “The Early Development of Southern Chivalry” is an indictment of how southern children are taught to be *chivalrous* slave masters; their play mirrors their world. Both the boy and girl are contentedly playing at being masters and mistresses of slaves, and as an apprenticeship of these future professions, they violently discipline their black dolls.²⁰⁸ It is not hard to see that Mary Belmont views the mulatto freak Frado in a similar way, even though the Bellmonts reside in a northern state, not a southern one—Wilson makes it clear that the southern states do not have a monopoly on this sort of “chivalry.” The title “Southern Chivalry” is also clear in Johnston’s graphic as it presupposes this behavior must be learned, played at, and internalized. How do children mirror their parents? How do children reflect society? How does the north mirror the south? Slave children also played games that internalized their parents’ experiences. These games involved hiding the switch as David Wiggins in “The Play of Slave Children in the Plantation Communities of the Old South, 1820-1860” explains:

²⁰⁷ David Claypoole Johnston, *The Early Development of Southern Chivalry*. [graphic] Boston: 1861-1865. American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA.

<http://catalog.mwa.org/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=438109>

²⁰⁸ Robin Bernstein, *Rachel Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: NYU Press, 2011) 52. “This invulnerability allows or even instructs a presumably white child to play violently with the doll. The copy suggests that every (white) child in America wants to abuse a black doll, and the virtue of this particular black doll is that it can endure that practice without shattering. The doll itself, in its materiality, is seen to invite its own abuse” (52).

Two games which were played repeatedly by slave children were different variations of “Hiding the Switch” and “No Bogeyman Tonight.” In the first activity the players hunted for a switch that had been concealed by one of the children. Whoever finds it runs after the others attempting to hit them. . . Julia Banks of Texas said they used to “get switches and whip one another. You know after you was hit several times it didn’t hurt much.”

(26)

Slave children played games that mirrored their world and incorporated aspects of their lives into their games. They were used to seeing their parents whipped, so they made a game of being beaten to confront and attempt to lessen their worst fears.

Mary Bellmont becomes as monstrous an abuser of Frado as Mrs. Bellmont is, even though Frado *does* all the work she is supposed to do. In fact later on in the novel Mrs. Bellmont questions her son James’s sanity when he complains that Frado is too thin and weak to work so hard. James insists that Frado be given rest and a better room (49). Mrs. Bellmont speaks to her husband John and he corroborates what James has said and then gives *her* assessment of Frado’s condition: “. . . you know these niggers are just like black snakes; you can’t kill them. If she wasn’t tough she would have been killed long ago. There was never one of my girls could do half the work” (49). Mr. Bellmont insists that Frado does more work than all of the other servants they have ever had combined. But his wife espouses the creed that Frado cannot be hurt because of her ethnicity. She likens Frado to a black snake (as Topsy was likened to a glittering serpent in Stowe’s text) and the mistress believes in breaking in servants or in Frado’s case breaking in her body and her spirit. Mrs. Bellmont believes Frado is a super strong “snake” with no feelings. She would happily be the instructress of the children in Claypoole’s Johnston’s graphic and Frado would be the black doll strapped to the chair. Mrs. Bellmont’s graphic would

be entitled: “Enjoy beating the black snake Frado; don’t worry, you can never hurt her.” She treats Frado as a freakish outsider and although no adult could endure the workload Frado carries in the house, the freak Frado can do what no other human can do—work inhumanely hard, with very little rest, very little to eat, and hardly any human consolation. Frado arrives at the Bellmonts when she is six and when she is there a year “Her labors were multiplied; she was quite indispensable, although but seven years old” (18). It is expedient for Mrs. Bellmont to believe Frado is the strongest little girl in the world, capable of accomplishing freakish physical feats. As Robin Bernstein explains in *Racial Innocence*: “When U.S. culture began, at mid-century, to libel black children as unhurttable and unchildlike, African Americans—both children and adults—began asserting that black children were, of course, children and did, of course feel pain” (55). Mrs. Bellmont goes out of her way to physically abuse the child even though she carries the work weight of all females in the family. Frado says of the house, “There seemed no one capable of enduring the oppression of the house but her” (61), as Mrs. Bellmont’s own children move away because of the bleak atmosphere in the house reflected through the poisonous character of their mother. As Fiedler tells us in *Freaks*: “...Freaks and monsters represented no longer the Other, but the Secret Self” (308). Mary’s and Mrs. Bellmont’s abuse of Frado is a projection of their inner monsters.

Frado is sick one day and although she keeps working, she sits while washing dishes. When Mrs. Bellmont chastises Frado for sitting, Frado replies, “I am sick” (46). This unleashes a monster within: “. . . she suddenly inflicted a blow which lay the tottering girl prostrate on the floor . . . and snatching a towel, stuffed the mouth of the sufferer, and beat her cruelly” (46). This mistress cannot even complain that the sick girl is not working—Frado just needs to rest and her mistress knocks her to the floor. Like the children in Johnston’s graphic *The Early*

Development of Southern Chivalry, Mary learns to treat Frado as her mother treats Frado ensuring the cruelty is internalized by the next generation. Dalzell says: “We find cruelty to have increased with refinement” (qtd. in Wallis 223). Ironically, Mary and Mrs. Bellmont see themselves as religious and refined and Frado as a contemptible slave. Frado is silenced by Mrs. Bellmont, but Wilson retells the silencing empowering herself in the process with a voice that is immortal—a published work.

Bernstein in *Racial Innocence* discusses instructions for the sewing of black dolls in the nineteenth century. She investigates the construction of black dolls and families of black dolls through manuals with doll making instructions for girls. These instructions were found in girls’ books from the 1830s through the 1880s entitled *American Girl’s Book, Or, Occupation for Play Hours* by Eliza Leslie. When giving directions to make a family of dolls, Eliza Leslie explains: “A black one may then be added as a servant” (203), thus instructing impressionable girls of the proper hierarchy in a family of dolls *for a black doll*. There is a different space and a different place for white and black dolls even in play. Bernstein explains: “The mode of sale and the physical properties of commercially produced black dolls also prompted play scenarios in which black dolls served white ones” (203). So, when Frado is abandoned at the Bellmont household, she is given the job of serving the family and doing all the chores even though she is just a child; she is expected to perform several adults’ duties just as the black doll was expected to serve the white family. Frado is tossed about the house as if she were an insensate black doll in David Claypoole Johnston graphic *The Early Development of Southern Chivalry*.

It is interesting to toy with the idea that Harriet Wilson is performing in this text. Wilson shows us that Frado was viewed as a freak upon her arrival at the Bellmonts. She is freakish because she is racially mixed; she is a freak because she performs amazing feats of strength; she

is a freak because no matter how often she is beaten, she does not break. One clear way Frado's freak status is established upon her arrival at the Bellmonts' is through her mixed race; because of her race she will be a slave laborer; this is established before the family knows about Frado's amazing work capacity. As McNeil explains: "Nineteenth-century science utilized categorizations of ethnographic and gender hierarchies for the marginalization of black women as consumable laboring and erotic objects. African American female writer-activists confronted the sexual and physical 'enfreakment' (Hevey 53) of black women to a certain extent during this period. . . ." (12). Wilson, instead of being entirely victimized by her "enfreakment," empowers herself by presenting Frado as freak for her own profit. At a time when slaves were auctioned off for sale, at a time when the slave body was worth money and southern plantation owners' wealth was situated in the number of slaves owned, Wilson takes ownership of her northern abused body, and markets herself as a mulatto freak in the hopes of reaping financial profit from her story. Harriet E. Wilson surely knew through experience what Mason in "From Father's Property to Children's Rights" explains: "Mulatto children of white mothers were treated more harshly than free black children, since there was a widespread fear and loathing of miscegenation . . . Generally, the law in the southern colonies dictated that all mulatto children, whether born of free or servant white women, must be bound out to service . . ." (41). Although Frado is born of a free white woman and lives in the North, she is abandoned and "bound out to service" to the Bellmonts. She is, at least visually, placed on an auction block by the family and her beauty is mentioned as a reason to keep her. Adams in *Sideshow U.S.A.* qualifies characteristics of racial freaks: ". . . a racial freak, [is] a stranded anomaly caught between two worlds" (33), and that definition captures Frado's status in *Our Nig*. She is a northern child who works harder than a southern slave child; she is not wholly black and she is not as white as the Bellmonts, yet she is

only a few shades darker than Mary: “She was not many shades darker than Mary now; what a calamity it would be ever to hear the contrast spoken of” (22). What a calamity it would be indeed. Part of Mrs. Belmont’s power comes from believing herself and her family to be above Frado because they are white and she is mixed. “In this view, racial crossing challenges the notion of a stable and discernable white identity” (Borgstrom 1293). Mrs. Belmont beats Frado to validate her own whiteness and to highlight Frado’s darkness, thereby cementing the master slave hierarchy and the normal freak dichotomy. Frado also blurs regional lines: she is a northern mulatto freak abused as though she were a southern slave. In fact Wiggins in “The Play of Slave Children in the Plantation...” explains that slave children were allowed play time and a lighter work load as they were, “Exempted from routine labor until sometimes as late as fourteen or fifteen years old. . .” (23). Frado is put to work by the Bellmonts at the tender age of six. Wiggins explains that the slave children had time to explore, run in the fields and play: “The slave children’s existence, however, was not all work and no play” (23). However, Frado’s existence as a free northern laborer is all about the work and no play. Regarding her first year in the Bellmont house Wilson tells us: “The same routine followed day after day, with slight variation; adding a little more work, and spicing the toil with ‘words that burn,’ and frequent blows on her head” (18). Frado is treated worse than slave children. As Melish in “The ‘Condition’ Debate and Racial Discourse in the Antebellum North” explains of free northern people of color: “There is abundant documentary evidence that, once emancipation laws were passed, whites continued to convey title and interest in ‘free’ persons of color as though they continued to be legally enslaved” (654). Such is the case of enslaved Frado in *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a free Black, In A Two-Story White House, North. Showing That*

Slavery's Shadows Fall Even There. Wilson's text, although published several years before the Emancipation Proclamation, illuminates the shadowy existence of black northern workers.

Frado has a family and siblings, and her mother abandons her. In a re-enactment of slaves' nightmares, namely being separated and sold away from their loved ones, Mag, a white northern woman separates herself from her mulatto daughter and in effect gives her child's body to the Bellmonts, something a southern slave woman would find unconscionable. Frado is not only disposed of by her mother, she is alienated from the Bellmonts because of her race. She is an inside outsider caught between the black and the white world; a northerner performing in an exhibit which exposes northern slavery which surpasses southern slavery in terms of child abuse—Frado's treatment rivals the worst exhibits of southern slavery. Frado's biological father, Jim, sums up this dualism in his own way when he proposes to Mag and tells her: "I's black outside, I know, but I's got a white heart inside. Which you rather have, a black heart in a white skin, or a white heart in a black one?" (9). Mrs. Bellmont has "a black heart in a white skin" and she ruthlessly abuses Frado throughout the book because of Frado's race. It is Frado's mulatta status that infuriates Mistress Bellmont; she believes she must make Frado a slave because the child is free, lives in the north, is beautiful, and can almost pass as white—this boundary crossing and racial slippage is not to be tolerated. As Kearney explains in "Evil, Monstrosity and The Sublime": "The evil figure is the alienated figure, that is, a self determined by some force beyond itself" (486). Certainly Frado in the Bellmont home is constructed as meeting the criteria of "the evil figure," as she is alienated from her biological mother, the Bellmonts, and northern abolitionists who do not promote her text; she is controlled by a force beyond herself in the shape Mrs. Bellmont who perceives Frado as evil because of her mixed race, poverty and abandonment. But the dramatic irony of how Frado stages herself as this evil freak has the

opposite effect. The reader sympathizes with Frado as her story exposes Mrs. Bellmont and Mary as the real evil figures.

Frado's mother is a white woman who abandons her children and calls them "black devils" (11). Mag and her partner, Seth, decide to dump the children because it is too hard for them financially to make ends meet. Frado's biological father, Jim, loved his children and his wife but Jim dies of consumption; Seth, Jim's business partner, wants no part of Jim's children. Seth knows that Frado is beautiful and should be a prized possession to whomever the couple leaves the child: "Frado. . . was a beautiful mulatto, with long, curly black hair, and handsome, rougish eyes, sparkling with an exuberance of spirit almost beyond restraint" (11). Frado's white mother and black father make her the product of amalgamation and therefore an outcast in the community, albeit a beautiful outcast. As her mother and adoptive father consider abandoning her they visualize her on the auction block and imagine what a prize she will be because of her beauty and proud spirit. Mag knows Mrs. Bellmont is a "she-devil" (12), yet she and Seth leave Frado at the Bellmonts anyway and never return for her. Frado is described by her mother: "Frado is such a wild, frolicky thing, and means to do just as she's a mind to. . ." (12). Frado has spirit and is brave and intelligent, but her mother and Seth believe she is hard to control and too much of an economic burden to feed and clothe, so they auction her off for a good price, for free. When the family passes by the schoolyard, the children yell: "'Black, white and yellor!'" (13), to emphasize the family's mixed racial status in the community. Mag leaves the orphan to fend for herself; Frado knows she is unwanted, abandoned and a "yellor" freakish outsider. Although her health is eventually broken from overwork, her spirit is undaunted. Mrs. Bellmont tries to hit Frado one last time and Frado says: "'Stop!' shouted Frado, 'strike me, and I'll never work a mite more for you'; and throwing down what she had gathered, stood like one who feels

the stirring of free and independent thoughts” (58). Part of her healing path is to stage herself as a freak and educate the reader through her novel performance.

At a time when the cult of motherhood was flourishing, the fact that Mag Smith leaves her child and never returns is heart wrenching; it is clear that Frado is freakish even to her own mother. The freak is an abandoned, unwanted “black devil” left at a “she-devil’s” house to be whipped and worked to death. Wilson is telling her own story and the words she uses are chosen carefully. When Mrs. Belmont notices Frado reading the Bible and crying over the words there she becomes nervous about Frado becoming pious and says: “I have let Nig go out to evening meetings a few times, and, if you will believe it, I found her reading the Bible to-day, just as though she expected to turn pious nigger, and preach to white folks” (49). Is that what Wilson is doing through Frado in her novel, preaching and teaching “...white folks”? Certainly her readership was exclusively white. In “Veiled Ladies” Brodhead “. . .defined reading as a preferred domestic activity. . .” (278), and how much more domestic and proper an activity is reading the Bible, but such behavior in Frado enrages her mistress. Since Wilson stages herself, questions arise regarding her portrayal of Frado such as: Why does Wilson stage herself as freak? What is the point of the endeavor? Does Wilson as a novel writer long for acceptance as a serious witness of history? Serious writers long to be involved in conversations about racism, sexism, education, slavery, and other topical issues of nineteenth-century America. Was Wilson’s novel not just an endeavor to support herself and her son, but an undertaking to morally reform antebellum racist attitudes? Mary Ryan investigates women’s moral reform movements in antebellum America, and in “The Power of Women’s Networks” she explains: “Female moral reform, then, constituted a concrete, specific attempt to exert woman’s power. Led and initiated by women, it was a direct, collective, organized effort, which aimed to control behavior and

change values in the community at large” (73). Many white women had servants of color, and Wilson’s text attempts to “change values in the community” regarding the mistreatment and undervalued worth of these workers. It is not possible to read *Our Nig* and perceive Mrs. Belmont as anything but a monster and Frado as anything but an abused child.

Adams in *Sideshow U.S.A.* discusses why the “outsider,” explorer Samuel Verner, was resentful of not being taken seriously in the burgeoning scientific community of the nineteenth century. Adams explains: “Alternately obsequious and resentful, Verner’s writings reveal a man who longed for acceptance within elite social and professional circles, yet remained perpetually on the margins, lacking the proper institutional or familial connections” (36). How similar Verner’s outsider status in the scientific community is to Harriet E. Wilson’s as a writer. She is a person “on the margins” longing for acceptance. Wilson crafts her novel hoping to be read “within elite social and professional circles” as a writer and shaper of history, and to wield control over her own historical narrative. As “. . . explorer and sometimes Presbyterian missionary Samuel Verner. . .” (Adams 32) tried to insinuate himself into the elite educational establishments after scouring the world for exhibitable freaks, so too does Wilson, exhibit herself as a freak and attempt to situate herself within the sphere of successful white writers and Barnumesque showmen. Wilson’s hope is to be accepted as a chronicler of cultural history regarding what it meant to be a mulatto economic slave in antebellum America. Barnum successfully staged a freak show event, “What is it?” Adams explains that this show was “Exhibited from 1860s to 1924 in New York City and elsewhere” (37), and had viewers trying to figure out whether what was being staged was a man, beast or some freaky hybrid.²⁰⁹ In “The

²⁰⁹ Rachel Adams, *Sideshow U.S.A.* “His [Verner’s] questions echo nearly verbatim those raised by P.T. Barnum’s famous exhibit, the What Is It?—a black man advertised as a hybrid of human and animal species (Figure 8). In

Phineas T. Barnum Freak Show” poster “. . . black people were featured as freaks and curiosities at the museum. . .” (44), and spectators were asked to contemplate the question “What is it?” over and over as they viewed the freaks.²¹⁰ One could ask a similar question of Wilson’s text *Our Nig*. What is it? Is it a novel? Is it an autobiography? Is it a book read simply for pleasure? Is it a children’s book? Is it the story of “a stranded anomaly caught between two worlds” (Adams 33). No, it is so much more than all these things. Wilson does not just pen a northern slave narrative, her text is more complex.²¹¹ She integrates various literary motifs such as: sentimental novel, slave narrative, bildungsroman, moral reform, and sideshow chapbook into her novel which attempted to eek out a space for a black woman novelist in nineteenth century America who stages herself as one of Barnum’s freakish curiosities.

In antebellum America to be a product of miscegenation was to be perceived as monstrous. However, Frado is not the monster in the text, despite antebellum views of her mixed blood. The real monsters in this novel are Mary and Mrs. Bellmont. As Jessica Murphy in “Nation, Miscegenation, and the Myth of the Mulatta/o Monster” explains of Wilson’s novel: “. . .the text exposes the real monster in the house, namely the white woman who is intent upon subjugating the young, mixed-race person in her midst” (32). In an interesting discussion of the etymology of the word “monster” Fiedler in *Freaks* explains: “‘Monster’ is as old as English itself, and remained the preferred name for Freaks from the time of Chaucer to that of Shakespeare and beyond. The etymology of the word is obscure; but whether it derives from *moneo*, meaning to warn, or *monstro*, meaning to show forth, the implication is the same: human

fact, publicity materials for the What Is It? Describe the creature as a fusion of African and orangutan, exactly the same mixture implied by the cohabitation of Ota Benga and Dohong. . .” (36).

²¹⁰ “The Phineas T. Barnum Freak Show,” *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 23 (1999): 44.

²¹¹ Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*, “Most depictions of African American children were denigrating, but some authors, white and black, produced fictional black child characters that were complex and mostly or fully realized; examples include Jacob Abbott’s *Rainbow* and Harriet Wilson’s *Frado* . . .” (33).

abnormalities are the products not of a whim of nature but of the design of Providence” (20).

Mrs. Belmont ensures that Frado’s fate is sealed as Providence in antebellum America would design--as an enslaved child, yet Wilson makes clear that the white mistress and her daughter are displayed as the real monsters and “human abnormalities” in terms of proper etiquette in the domestic sphere of nineteenth century America. Wilson’s portrayal of Mary’s and Mrs. Belmont’s monstrous behavior can be seen as “...*moneo*, meaning to warn...” (20). In effect the text is a means to warn readers about of the possibility of losing one’s soul by cruelly abusing house servants; these Belmont women are guilty of poisoning the domestic sphere.

Mrs. Belmont does all in her power to abuse and silence Frado. Frado is up early in her new home and she does chores such as feeding the chickens and driving the cows to pasture. After this she is allowed have a meager breakfast. “Upon her return she was allowed to eat her breakfast. . . standing, by the kitchen table, and must not be over ten minutes about it” (17). The family is eating in the dining room, yet Frado is not allowed to sit alone at the kitchen table to rest and eat. Mrs. Belmont ensures that Frado is never seen as anything else in the house but a freakish slave. To enhance her darkness, Mrs. Belmont forbids Frado to cover her skin when she works in the sun: “At home, no matter how powerful the heat when sent to rake hay or guard the grazing herd, she was never permitted to shield her skin from the sun. . . Mrs. Belmont was determined the sun should have full power to darken the shade which nature had first bestowed upon her as best befitting” (22). Mary Belmont’s skin is not much lighter than Frado’s and Mrs. Belmont wants to accentuate Frado’s darkness to showcase Mary’s “lightness” as proof of the family’s superiority. Joanne Melish investigates the racial tension in antebellum America where a light skinned person of color was an uncomfortable boundary crosser: “White negroes were, after all, negroes, not evidence of transformation but mere freaks; republican whiteness would

finally triumph over the sun and enslavement” (“The ‘Condition’ Debate and Racial Discourse in the Antebellum North” 657). Needless to say the discerning reader sees Mary for the evil witch she is no matter how many shades lighter she is than Frado; that is Wilson’s intent, but Frado’s whiteness is cause for concern. However, as Stephens and Phillips in “Freaks, Gold Diggers, Divas, and Dykes” explain: “The good, innocent, virginal girl continues to be an idealized image of womanhood associated with white females, but unattainable for African American females” (4). Inexplicably, Mary would be perceived as the “idealized image of womanhood” simply because she is white.

Wilson showcases Mrs. Bellmont and Mary Bellmont as monsters; they corrupt themselves in their attempt to crush Frado. Mary, jealous of Frado’s popularity in school, attempts to drown Frado. Mary “. . . dragged her to the edge, and told her authoritatively to go over. Nig hesitated, resisted. Mary placed herself behind the child, and, in the struggle to force her over, lost her footing and plunged into the stream” (20). Mary tries to get Frado to fall into the stream and almost drowns herself. “Some of the larger scholars being in sight, ran, and thus prevented Mary from drowning and Frado from falling” (20). Mary is so jealous of Frado’s popularity that she attempts to kill Frado. Mary is clearly not the perfect, white, innocent Little Eva of Stowe’s text—Frado’s fills that void in *Our Nig*. But because of her white ethnicity, Mary gets away with cruelly abusing and almost murdering Frado. Wilson has the last laugh, however, as Mary dies in the text and Frado lives to tell her own history and the Bellmonts’ history. But it is through the abuse of Frado’s body that her freak status is exemplified. Stephens and Phillips discuss exhibition of exotic bodies for money: “In 1810, the eighteen-year-old [Saartjie] was persuaded to leave Cape Town by a French ship’s doctor who told her that she could make a fortune displaying herself to European crowds fascinated by the tales of

the exotic, animalistic body of African women (Giddings 1995)” (7). And Bernth Lindfors in “Ethnological Show Business” explains that both men and women were encouraged to touch, prod, and explore Saartjie’s body to ascertain the authenticity of her exotic physique: “Some of the spectators accepted this invitation by touching her rump and searching for evidence of padding . . . A woman who saw the show reported that ‘one pinched her, another walked round her; one gentleman *poked* her with his cane; and one *lady* employed her parasol to ascertain that all was, as she called it, ‘*nattral*’” (208). This abuse of an ethnic other’s body is viewed as entertainment (by some) and audience participation in authenticating the validity of the exhibit was condoned. Harriet Wilson is exhibiting her own body; its exoticness, its mixed race, its amazing strength, and its pain in order to highlight her freak status and advertise her own body’s abuse to market her story.

Although Frado has been allowed to go to school, at nine years old Mrs. Bellmont makes sure her education ceases. Frado is an astute, wildly popular student in school, whereas Mary is not. Mary is described as “...self-willed, domineering; every day reported ‘mad’ by some of her companions” (19). Frado was always playing pranks at school and she was accepted and protected by her fellow students: “They enjoyed her antics so fully that any of them would suffer wrongfully to keep open the avenues of mirth. She would venture far beyond propriety, thus shielded and countenanced” (22). Bernstein explains: “Frado finds school to be a shelter from the oppression at home” (162). So Mrs. Bellmont takes away Frado’s shelter and only means of escape, elevation, and consolation--school.

Each and every day Frado does all the work in the home, and although she is clearly indispensable to the family, she is physically and mentally tortured by Mrs. Bellmont. The reader only sees Mrs. Bellmont physically exert herself when she beats Frado. When Frado does not

move fast enough Mrs. Belmont gives “. . . her a box on her ear. . .” (24). Mr. John Belmont knows Frado is being abused but he is despicably ineffectual to enact change. If Wilson’s novel was staged like Tennessee Williams’ *The Glass Menagerie* with onscreen *images*, Mr. Belmont’s screen legend or “Tableau!”²¹² would read: “The Ineffectual Male.” Aunt Abby, John Belmont’s sister, wonders why he does nothing to stop Frado’s abuse. He simply replies: “How am I to help it? Women rule the earth, and all in it” (25). Frado is not just abandoned by her biological family, she is abandoned by Mr. Belmont, the master of her adopted family. As Foreman in “The Spoken and the Silenced...” explains: “... abandonment in *Our Nig* is achieved through the death and silence of its male characters” (320). Clearly Mr. Belmont fears and is silenced by his witch wife, but his inaction is more insidious than Simon Legree’s torture of Tom because Frado is just a child and the master of the house is too weak to protect the abandoned orphan. Mr. Belmont is even more ineffectual than his sons who variously attempt to shield Frado: “Mr. Belmont found himself unable to do what James or Jack could accomplish for her” (58). He is not unlike Augustine St. Clare in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*; St. Clare does not physically abuse his slaves, but although he is prompted several times by his cousin Ophelia to make plans for his slaves’ futures, he never does and they are all, with the exception of Topsy, sold at auction because of St. Clare’s refusal to legally protect them. He too, is an ineffectual protector of his slaves.

Frado’s torture does not just consist of beatings and abuse at home; when she ventures out in public, her mistress ensures that she is seen as a freak by her clothing. On her first day of school Mary Belmont refuses to walk with Frado because of her ragged clothing. Frado arrives

²¹² Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, Duke UP, 1993) 115. “Joyce is apparently borrowing here from the parlor game in which participants strike poses meant to symbolize a message and say ‘Tableau!’ to announce that the pose is complete and ready to be observed and interpreted” (115).

at school “. . . with scanty clothing and bared feet . . .” (19). As Sunquist in *To Wake a Nation* explains: “. . . A naked race must necessarily be a wild one. To Christianize or civilize a man, you must first clothe his nakedness. . .” (187). Mary and Mrs. Belmont want Frado to be perceived as a primitive savage. Frado is dressed coarsely, she is not allowed to have “Sunday best” attire, and not permitted to attend church, but she goes to evening meetings with Aunt Abby to learn of God and religion. Susan wants Frado to attend James’s funeral as one of the family and finds a suitable dress for her, but she forgets Frado also needs a bonnet. Frado wears a black bonnet with a pink flower and the bystanders whisper, “Look there! See there! How that looks,—a black dress and a pink ribbon!” (54). She is criticized for being out of proper dress. Wallis in “Moral and Racial Prejudice” explains how this too can cause one to be classified as a freak: “. . . nothing worse can be said of a ‘freak than that he indulges in belief, behavior or costume not at that time common to the group in which he lives” (219). Mrs. Belmont ensures Frado’s clothing highlights her outcast status in the group of church goers. Karin Bohleke in “Americanizing French Fashion Plates” explains: “Desired dress and desired behavior were literally inseparable. . .” (124). Mrs. Belmont explains her views on Frado’s soul: “Religion was not meant for niggers. . .” (38). Frado’s mistress tries in every way possible to crush the child. She takes her out of school when Frado is popular and excelling; she forces Frado to work in the sun without a hat; she beats Frado and (as if she were an animal) sheared off “. . . her glossy ringlets. . .” (38), because the curls clearly enhance Frado’s natural beauty. At one point Mrs. Belmont commands Frado to eat her dinner from her mistress’s plate; Frado refuses and Mrs. Belmont insists—she does not want to waste a clean dinner plate on Frado. Frado gives the dinner plate to her dog Fido, so that the dog could wash off Mrs. Belmont’s residue—Frado would rather eat from the dish after her dog has licked it, than eat from the plate

besmeared by Mrs. Bellmont. “Quickly looking about, she took the plate, called Fido to wash it, which he did to the best of his ability. . .” (39). Of course this behavior enrages Mrs. Bellmont and she wants her husband or her son James to beat the child. In her own way Frado faces up to Mrs. Bellmont; Frado has spirit. In Wilson’s retelling of her story, she clearly portrays Mrs. Bellmont as the “she devil” in the text. Wilson’s savvy marketing of herself and the staging of the white woman of the cherished domestic sphere as the monstrous mistress in the house instead of Coventry Patmore’s “The Angel in the House,” are meant to expose northern hypocrisy and sell her novel.

When James Bellmont, another of Frado’s ineffectual male advocates in the house, is dying Frado does her regular heavy housework and stays up late talking and comforting James. “No one, but his wife, could move him so easily as Frado; so that in addition to her daily toil she was often deprived of her rest at night” (45). Mrs. Bellmont is jealous of the special friendship James shares with Frado. When she catches Frado crying because of James’s impending death, she viciously beats the girl and pretends that she is disciplining her for crying over the chores she has to do: “Mrs. Bellmont found her weeping on his account, shut her up, and whipped her with the raw-hide, adding an injunction never to be seen sniveling again because she had a little work to do” (43). In a demonic way Mrs. Bellmont’s life revolves around torturing a free child who wants nothing more than to be treated with respect and to be allowed a place in the family.

Ostrowski in “Slavery, Labor Relations and Intertextuality in Antebellum Print Culture” explains that violence in slave narratives served as a catalyst to move the cause of abolition forward:

“Slave narrators of the late 1840s and 1850s began to regard shocking violence as an aid rather than an impediment to establishing their credibility” (503). Mrs. Bellmont is the cruel, violent northern slave mistress who violates her role as the protector of a peaceful house and a humble

hearth. She is a monster who rejoices in whipping and crushing her servant girl. That is didactic entertainment for mid-nineteenth century readers. As Brodhead in “Veiled Ladies” explains: “After all, the steep escalation of literary sales figures around 1850 must be understood to have reflected not only improved production factors like cheaper printing technologies or more active marketing campaigns, but quite as essentially the historical creation of a new social place or need for literary entertainment to fill” (277-278). Wilson’s *Our Nig* fills that “literary entertainment” niche through Frado’s freakish antics and through Mistress Belmont’s Legree-like cruelty. In “Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture,” Halttunen explains: “The spectacle of suffering-which had first emerged from moral philosophy, found its full articulation in sentimental literature and art, then assumed increasingly sadistic forms in popular sensationalism. . .” (317). Mrs. Belmont’s frequent whippings of Frado are “sadistic forms” of entertainment utilized by Harriet Wilson in her text which inhabits the interstices of various genres like sentimental literature, popular sensationalism, slave narrative, biography, and freak show spectacle. As the public was entertained and educated at Barnum’s American Museum, so readers are educated and sensationally entertained in the various salons Frado is exhibited in throughout the Belmont home, the farm, and Frado’s school.

When Mary Belmont leaves to go visit her brother Lewis, Frado dances and rejoices that the younger mistress monster is leaving the house. Frado contorts her body and dances in Aunt Abby’s room unable to contain her joy at Mary’s departure. Frado tells Abby: “I hope she’ll never come back again” (45), and Mary never does; she takes sick and dies and Frado’s dance of joyful prayer is answered. Barbara Welter in “The Cult of True Womanhood” emphasizes: “True feminine genius is perpetual childhood” and Wilson’s genius is her autobiography wherein

the “twisting”²¹³ Frado is a perpetual child. But Wilson’s presentation of the freak child fractures notions of domesticity as does her portrayal of Mrs. Belmont. Ernest in “The Art of Chaos” mentions Hosea Easton and his description of African Americans who “. . . belong to no people, race, or nation; subjects of no government—citizens of no country—scattered surplus remnants of two races, and of different nations—severed into individuality—rendered a mass of broken fragments, thrown to and fro, by the boisterous passions of this and other ungodly nations” (qtd. in Ernest 5). An attempt to define the African American community in antebellum America is difficult because it is fragmented. As America herself attempts definition and status among powerful nations in the world, so too, the African American community mid-nineteenth century attempts to define itself and find cohesion and support in community. It is hard to find as Frado’s situation illustrates. Harriet Wilson is a part of this community, but separated from it just as she is a part of the Belmont household but distinctly separate; her existence is fragmented and her story is a bridge she utilizes to define herself and construct an identity and existence—her words attempt to create a shared history. As Ernest explains of *Clotel*, and his explanation is equally appropriate for Frado in *Our Nig*, she is, “Operating in that unstable interstice . . .” (“The Art of Chaos” 5) between white and black, free and slave, American and other, cherished child and freak.

Salon Two: Northern slave monsters and the beautiful, gifted mulatta freak.

Sideshow freaks were not passive receptors of people’s stares—they returned the stare -- and saw for themselves an equally entertaining sideshow or slice of the “unstable interstice” that was America mid-century. Similarly, readers of Wilson’s freak Frado saw other curiosities in

²¹³ Harriet E. Wilson, *Our Nig* or, *Sketches from the Life of a Free Black* (New York: Penguin, 2005) 45. “. . . Nig slyly crept round to Aunt Abby’s room, and tiptoeing and twisting herself into all shapes, she exclaimed,—‘She’s gone, Aunt Abby, she’s gone, fairly gone. . .’” (45).

the text such as white women who shatter the image of the domestic sphere with noise, violence, and corruption. The main story is about Frado, but the cruel sideshow performance of Mrs. Belmont and Mary Belmont proves just as informative for readers because in the end, the act of viewing freaks always tell us more about ourselves than them.

As Brodhead informs us in “Veiled Ladies,” as women were enclosed in the domestic sphere, they simultaneously made heroes of writers. Some writers such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Fanny Fern were objects to be visually consumed by readers. Reading is a domestic occupation and the reading public desired the satisfying spectacle of consuming the characters they adored with their eyes through reading. Although Topsy was a marketable, consumable “good” as Stowe frequently read from the Topsy scenes when she went on her lecture tour, and various stage performances of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* often doubled the Topsy character believing that two Topsys were better than one, Frado’s story was relegated as a children’s book, to be read as a didactic example of a servant turned Christian. That is not to underestimate what children’s books can teach readers of a time period. As Fielder in *Freaks* explains, if one is looking for a definition of what is normal versus what is freakish, look to children’s books: “. . . children’s literature, books written for boys and girls or usurped by them, provide the essential clues” (27). Frequently, children’s books were read at home around the fire for the whole family to enjoy. What Wilson does with Frado in her novel is similar to the constructed narrative of what prompted Fanny Fern to write *Ruth Hall*. Brodhead explains: “Ruth Hall tells of a contentedly domestic woman left destitute by her husband’s death and threatened with the loss of her child until, in her darkest hour, she finds her way to the work of writing” (11). Obviously, Frado is *not* content in her domestic sphere at the Bellmonts, but upon leaving she attempts to save herself and her son after being abandoned by her confidence man husband. The

reasons for writing *Ruth Hall* and *Our Nig* are strikingly similar. Wilson, like Fern turns to writing to save herself and her child. Wilson looks to cash in on the sideshow spectacle available wherein a woman presents the ultimate private domestic abuse story for public viewing, in order to support herself and her family. Interestingly, the story of why Fanny Fern wrote *Ruth Hall* is a constructed one. She wrote it because her publisher believed he could make a lot of money through her storytelling.²¹⁴ Part of the genre jumping issue was played out in the newspaper with headlines like: “IS RUTH HALL AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL?”²¹⁵ in order to involve the readers in the task of figuring out whether or not the book was/is fiction or nonfiction; readers are engaged as experts to assess the authenticity of the autobiography. In a similar fashion, Barnum had visitors to his museum attempt to discern whether or not a freak on display was authentic. He did this with Joice Heth and had people touch her to assess her authenticity, as he had planted newspapers stories that insinuated Heth was an automaton (*The Colossal P.T. Barnum Reader* 39). As Neal Harris in *Humbug* explains Barnum expertise was piquing people’s curiosity: “The public would be more excited by controversy than by conclusiveness” (23). Wilson too believed she could support herself with her constructed narrative of abuse in a free abolitionist state and her story is certainly controversial. Unfortunately, Wilson’s story does not generate the saleable interest that Fern’s, Stowe’s, Cummins’s or other white women’s novels did. Possibly antebellum racism existed for black writers’ words too. It is one thing to have a white author like Stowe create a freak like Topsy so everyone can laugh at Topsy’s primitivism, and then rejoice when she is changed; it is another thing to have a black woman writer enfreak herself,

²¹⁴ Richard Brodhead, “Veiled Ladies: Toward a History of Antebellum Entertainment,” *American Literary History* 1.2 (1989): 273-294. “Susan Geary has recently established that the writing of *Ruth Hall* was first proposed not by Fern but a publisher—Mason Brothers—eager to add this profitable author to its fold. . .” (283).

²¹⁵ Richard Brodhead, “Veiled Ladies: Toward a History of Antebellum Entertainment,” *American Literary History* 1.2 (1989): 273-294. “. . . Mason Brothers publicized its ‘obscure’ personalness, running ads that tantalizing asked: ‘IS RUTH HALL AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL?’” 286.

and as a facet of the performance, lift the veil to reveal the white woman and white daughter as the moral monstrosities. So Wilson's freaking Frado reveals racism in the publishing world; if literature teaches a lesson, readers want to be instructed by white writers. As Mrs. Belmont states of Frado going to religious meetings: "Yes, but who ever thought of having a nigger go, except to drive others there? Why, according to you and James, we should very soon have her in the parlor, as smart as our own girls" (49-50). Wilson is not as well known in the parlor as other bestselling writers; but she tries to break down barriers with her novel and market her own text. As Ernest in "Economies of Identity" explains: "Ultimately, *Our Nig* argues that communal self-purchase begins with this book; the story of the life produced by this culture serves as the catalyst for new productions in the ongoing quest to convert disparate cultural property into a common humanity" (436). Frado advocates for her humanity in the Belmont house, but she is treated like a workhorse. Wilson, the writer, advocates for her place among other nineteenth century writers on her own terms. She wants to be the one constructing the narrative and profiting from the story of her body's abuse. Her novel is her "communal self-purchase"; she crafts her narrative and elbows her way into the fray that was antebellum publishing. Melish explains that definitive terms characterizing citizens in the antebellum period were up for grabs: "Thus, 'white' and 'slave,' 'free' and 'negro' emerged as free-floating terms, available as an explanatory and metaphorical language useful for investigating and describing the disruptive political, social, and perhaps biological consequences of republican self-rule as well as emancipation" (656). To this list of 'free-floating terms' might be added "writer," "autobiography," "novelist," as Wilson attempts to master these forms and tell her story. Through Mrs. Belmont's harsh abuse of Frado, Mrs. B. wants to concretize the term "white," and ensure her place in the hierarchy of antebellum north.

Throughout *Our Nig*, Mrs. Bellmont pretends to believe that Frado does not have feelings or a soul. Bellmont is a woman of her time as Bernstein in *Racial Innocence* explains:

Mrs. Bellmont wants to see Frado as a pickaninny who is too stupid to sorrow, but Bellmont can only ‘pretend’ to believe in the essentiality of the performance she coerced. Frado dons a tearless mask, an appearance, only, of the absence of feeling . . . Wilson brilliantly deconstructs the libel of black insensateness, showing it to be neither a symptom of black inferiority (as per proslavery writers) nor a pathological response to violence (as per Stowe), but rather a black performance that white people coerce out of their own pathological desires simultaneously to cause pain and to deny that they are doing so. (57)

Wilson’s text causes pain. It forces readers to see that the northern white woman, the mother and matriarch of the cherished domestic sphere is corrupt and is raising an equally diabolical daughter. We do not have to worry about Mary’s future polluted hearth, as she dies; Wilson breaks that cycle of abuse. Wilson upends the notion that white is right and northerners are entitled to clear consciences when it comes to the slavery issue.

In a similar display of presumed white superiority, Sarah Amato’s “The White Elephant in London” discusses Barnum’s staging of a rare white elephant as a superior pachyderm because of its whiteness. Amato says: “. . . Barnum’s trick provoked anxiety about the maintenance of racial purity and white privilege” (32), as the elephant was not truly white, just whiter than other elephants. Similarly, Wilson’s trick of staging Frado as a mulatto freak causes anxiety, as readers *cannot* experience Frado’s abuse without questioning white superiority, and conceding Frado’s preeminence. Readers are also left anxious about the assumed freedom of northern

blacks, and through Mrs. Bellmont and her daughter Mary, readers are left questioning tenets of Christianity, as both women suggest that there is no heaven for blacks; both women believe that they are morally superior to the mulatto freak—readers see through this lie. Frado is the freakish nobody whose otherness causes readers to experience slavery's hold on the north. As Judith McArthur explains: “. . . moral instruction in the guise of entertainment brought good returns at the box office” (518), and Wilson knows what sells. Although her novel does not become a lucrative bestseller, her text survives and she is not silenced.

It is not hard to see that Wilson, an astute survivor, was influenced by the great showman of the nineteenth century, Phineas Taylor Barnum. J.R. Ellis ponders Wilson's subsequent career as a mesmerist and thinks about how that showmanship facet of her personality influenced her as she wrote *Our Nig*. Ellis states: “. . . Wilson in 1859 might have been manipulating key aspects of her fictionalized narrative for commercial ends. After all, she tells us explicitly that she needs the money, just as she will years later manipulate her audience as a medium” (168). Harriet Wilson stages herself as a freak and presents the circus sideshow of society's hypocrisy regarding slavery and white women's superiority through the character of Frado, and she does this for remunerative ends, just as Barnum does. Wilson attracts readers to her text with promises of a good show. She has learned that skill through incorporating the successful schemes utilized by P.T. Barnum. Wilson surpasses Barnum in staging herself. When Barnum marketed Jenny Lind he controlled the publicity aspect of Lind's famous tour—Barnum marketed Lind. Wilson was in charge of marketing herself. Brodhead in “Veiled Ladies” explains that most nineteenth century successful women writers had men market them: “As such this figure brings back to our attention the mid-nineteenth-century female celebrity's typical dependence on a male handler to achieve her public ‘life’” (279). As P.T. Barnum does for Jenny Lind, Harriet E. Wilson does

for herself. Granted, she is not as successful in staging herself as freak as the impresario of the nineteenth century was at staging Jenny Lind, but one can understand how after having her body abused Wilson would be loath to turn her written creation over to a white handler and expect him/her to treat her equitably.

Part of Wilson's marketing of her text is to be honest about the mistreatment she received, and her novel painstakingly details her abuse. Although Stowe's character Topsy is brutally abused by her former owner before she comes to the St. Clare mansion, she is treated fairly well throughout Stowe's novel. Her mistress, Marie St. Clare, is an indifferent, cold mother figure in the text, and remarkably, Topsy is the only slave who is saved from the auction block because Miss Ophelia ensures that her cousin Augustine St. Clare legally signs Topsy over to her. Topsy is unlike Frado because Frado, although free, is mistreated by a brutal white mistress, and Topsy is saved from the auction block by a white northerner, who eventually frees her.

In order to explain the learned behavior of abusing slave/servant girls, Bernstein in *Racial Innocence* discusses nineteenth century Topsy/Turvy reversible attached dolls. These black, white unidolls were very popular with both slave and white children. The doll is one doll that is similar to a conjoined freak who is attached at the waist—it has no legs, but each doll has a head, arms and a long waist. Beneath the doll's skirt hides the other doll; one doll is black and the other doll is white. Children were taught to treat the two dolls differently. Bernstein discusses the evolution of the Topsy-Turvy Doll into the Topsy/Eva doll, which happened with the marketing of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* objects. The Topsy portion of the Topsy/Eva doll was meant to be abused because it was the opposite, inverted version of the perfectly delicate Eva doll; the Topsy doll was essentially constructed to be impervious to pain. Wilson's story is published

after Stowe's but in reality it is Frado who is almost beaten to death by her white, Christian mistress, presumably because Frado too, is impervious to pain. Frado is constructed as senseless—you can say anything to her or do anything to her with impunity. Harriet E. Wilson presents Frado to entertain readers with true stories, minstrel behavior, and atrocious abuse. What is most provocative about Frado is her beauty, as she can almost pass as white. Frado is intelligent and wants to go to school; she wants to do a good job in the Bellmont residence, but she is denied friendship, humanity, and worst of all she is denied a home.

Wilson presents herself as a freak in order to educate the readers about the tenuous position free blacks hold, specifically the precarious position of free black women in antebellum America. Frado is a boundary crosser as her mother is white and her father is black—Frado, like Hawthorne's Pearl, is tainted by her mother's "sinful" behavior. Wilson's Frado is a product of amalgamation and an oxymoronic character as she is simultaneously enslaved and free, white and black, freak and showman, Topsy and Eva—Frado does not die, but she is the black little Eva who offers comfort to the sick and abused members of the Bellmont family like James Bellmont and Jack's wife Jenny who is shamelessly abused by Mrs. Bellmont. Mrs. Bellmont is too cruel: ". . . Jane after vain endeavors, became disgusted, weary, and perplexed, and decided that, though her mother might suffer, she could not endure her home" (60). They leave Frado in the unhappy place to be abused. Frado weeps because of Mrs. Bellmont's verbal abuse of Aunt Abby. Frado is "Stung by the unmerited rebuke, weak from sorrow and anxiety, the tears rolled down her dark face, soon followed by sobs, and then losing all control of herself, she wept aloud . . . Her mistress grasping her raw-hide, caused a longer flow of tears, and wounded a spirit that was craving healing mercies" (56). Frado misses James after his death and is trying to heal. The

harridan, Mrs. Belmont, beats Frado again, even though her son has recently died, the house is in mourning, and she knows James favored Frado and it would hurt him to have her abused.

Wilson fights for her cause and utilizes *Our Nig* to present the freak show that is slavery to highlight the “precarious status of whiteness”²¹⁶ her existence threatens. As R. J. Ellis explains: “. . . Frado is most certainly, in an ironic inversion, held ‘captive’ by the white Bellmonts” (164), and forced into indentured servitude. She is abused like slaves in the south. What the freak in this text makes clear is that she is not the only freak in the text. Frado’s treatment highlights moral “freaks of nature” exemplified by Mrs. Belmont and Mary Bellmont. We watch the abusive women and the abused child in this novel. As Halttunen reminds us: “The literary scenario of suffering, which made ethics a matter of viewing the pain of another, from the outset lent itself to an aggressive kind of voyeurism in which the spectator identified not just with the sufferings of the virtuous victim but with the cruelty of her tormentor” (“Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain...” 308-9). Wilson’s novel satisfies a voyeuristic, sensationalist niche with Mrs. Belmont’s and Mary’s torture of Frado, but the torture is of a different ilk since Wilson herself is in control of the voyeuristic details.

It is worth returning to Amato’s article “The White Elephant of London” which details Barnum’s presentation of a white elephant at the London Zoological Garden. It means something, in terms of white superiority in this European city, pursuing imperialism abroad, to exhibit this rare white elephant. Amato says: “In the article whiteness was constructed as an attribute that could be assigned or denied; it was a demonstrable indicator of status evidenced by skin tone and hygiene, and it commanded respect” (31). A white elephant would be a freak of

²¹⁶ Sarah Amato, “The White Elephant in London: An Episode of Trickery, Racism and Advertising,” *Journal of Social History* 43.1 (2009): 31-66.

nature, but its whiteness renders it superior, though freakish. It is interesting that the whiteness of Frado's skin, instead of commanding respect, is provocative and elicits intense abuse from Mary and Mrs. Belmont. Frado's almost white skin and beauty cause a barrage of abuse. Frado is free, yet she is treated abominably because she is morally superior to her mistress. In order to justify her treatment of Frado, Mrs. Belmont highlights her mulatto status and disguises Frado's whiteness because if Frado could almost pass as white, Mrs. Belmont's abuse of her would be problematic. Stephens and Phillips explain the place on the hierarchical evolutionary scale of African Americans during the first part of the nineteenth century: "Essentially, those of African descent are presumed closer to the animal kingdom than to the highest living beings, white males of European descent" (6).²¹⁷ And Mrs. Belmont treats Frado with this internalized view in mind that the child is an animal, yet Frado shows again and again that she does not fit this stereotype. She is smart, hard working, empathetic, comical, astute and successful in school socially and academically. Frado outshines other women in the Belmont household not only in terms of the work she can do, but in terms of her caring attitude towards James Belmont when he is sick and dying. Whereas the sick bed is not a place Mary feels comfortable, Frado is there night and day to comfort James. Frado is the little Eva of this text; she embodies both dolls in the Topsy-Turvy toy.

Frado's otherness exists on many levels. When her mother Mag is seduced by an affluent white man and surrenders to him "a priceless gem," Mag's reputation and life are ruined. Mag is relieved when the baby girl born of *this* relationship dies. She says: "'God be thanked... 'no one can taunt *her* with my ruin'" (5). Mag knows that the transgressions of the mother are visited

²¹⁷ Dionne P. Stephens and Layli D. Phillips, "Freaks, Gold Diggers, Divas, And Dykes: The Sociohistorical Development of Adolescent African American Women's Sexual Scripts," *Sexuality and Culture* 7.1 (2003): 3-49. "Social Darwinism is based on the survival of the fittest model, stating that the African 'race' is the lowest on the hierarchy of humans in terms of intelligence, health, civility, and basic reasoning (Krieger and Fee 1996)" (6).

upon the child, as is the case with Hester and Pearl in Hawthorne's novel. Wilson's voice echoes Mag's relief at the child's death: "Blessed release! May we all respond. How many pure, innocent children not only inherit a wicked heart of their own, claiming life-long scrutiny and restraint, but are heirs also of parental disgrace and calumny, from which only long years of patient endurance in paths of rectitude can disencumber them" (6). Mag is not a slave; she later will marry a black man and Frado is a product of this marriage. The mixed blood child, even in the north embodies the stains of slavery. As Lowance and Pilditch in "Writing the Law" explain: "Further, in this new democracy, slavery was hereditary and perpetual. There was no recourse to law even in matters of personal safety, and the benefits of education were to be withheld. Law did not grant even the moral and religious instruction, and under law the efforts of Humanitarian societies were 'discountenanced'" (72). So following the letter of the law, Mrs. Bellmont is a law abiding slave mistress; however, she lives in New Hampshire and views herself as a religious, caring, mother. As the narrator in the text explains of Mrs. Bellmont: "It was her favorite exercise to enter the apartment noisily, vociferate orders, give a few sudden blows to quicken Nig's pace, then return to the sitting room with *such* a satisfied expression, congratulating herself upon her thorough house-keeping qualities" (37). Mrs. Bellmont knows nothing about keeping her house together, her husband does not enjoy her company, and her children one by one exit her house of horrors.

Last Salon: *the exit*

Frado is morally and ethically superior to other characters in *Our Nig*, and Wilson's staging techniques validate this. Wilson controls her narrative and markets it on her own terms. She outlives members of the Heyward/Bellmont family and spends a portion of her adult life as a mesmerist utilizing "showmanship" skills she learned from Barnum. As Barnum would always

want his patrons to leave having had (and paid for) a good time, he also wanted patrons to exit the museum enlightened, so Harriet E. Wilson wants readers to be demystified about the state of northern servants in staunch abolitionist territory. Wilson is nearly worked to death as a slave; she is whipped morally and emotionally. Slavery is not just a southern problem. The moral high ground of the abolitionist communities need to take a look in the mirror or simply read *Our Nig* to see where they have gone wrong. Lowance and Pilditch discuss the impact of various slave laws in “Writing the Law.” They state: “Penal codes weighed more heavily on slaves; they could make no contracts, and they were required to submit to all white people, not only their masters. They could not testify in their own defense in the judicial system, but were dependent on a white person should they have wrongs they wished to rectify” (72-3). In an ultimate act of empowerment Wilson testifies on her own behalf. She is now only dependent on the Bellmonts in that they provide grist for her narrative. Wilson has her wrongs witnessed and testified to through her text. Her status as outsider is also verified through the fact that she lives in Milford, New Hampshire and exposes the hypocrisy of abolitionists there. Eric Gardner explains that ethnically Wilson was an outsider as “The 1850 Census Population Abstracts show 2,159 people living in Milford; Harriet Wilson was the only black woman . . .” (“This Attempt of Their Sister” 233). When it comes to selling her text, she does have an audience in Milford; most of her readers seem to have been children, so although her indigent status caused her to give up her son who soon thereafter died, *Our Nig* may have been instrumental in helping other children extricate themselves from slavery’s shadow (“This Attempt of Their Sister” 246).

Our Nig’s appeal as a gift to children may have been prompted by the fact that Frado is converted and becomes religious—we see her reading the Bible in the novel. In a publication by the American Tract Society entitled, *Advice to Sabbath School Children* published between

1848-50, guidance is delineated numerically from one to ten and by following these recommendations a child could embody religious tenets and be considered a good boy or girl. Frado passes these recommendation with flying colors, but is still treated as a freak in the Belmont house. Number one is: “*Be attentive to instruction*” (5). Frado listens and does what she is told from the time she arrives in the household. Number two is: “*Be thankful to your religious teachers*” (5). Frado is happy to go to evening meetings with Aunt Abby and learn about God. She is also instructed by James Belmont. When Frado rejoices that Mary Belmont is leaving the house, Aunt Abby says to her: “But you forget what our good minister told us last week, about doing good to those that hate us” (45). Frado discusses heaven and hell with James. She questions why God made her black and Mrs. Belmont white. She tells James that she doesn’t like God: “Because he made her white, and me black. Why didn’t he make us both white?” (29). Frado listens to her teachers in a questioning way; she wants to understand God’s motives. Frado is thankful to her religious teachers and tries to understand the world through the microcosm of the Belmont house. She spends her free time reading her Bible in her room.

Number three in *Advice to Sabbath School Children* is: “*Honor and obey your parents*” (6). Frado loves her biological father Jim who dies. When she realizes that something is in the wind with Mag and her stepfather Seth, she runs away. Her instincts were correct; they were planning to abandon her, which they do upon her return. Frado tries to honor her parents or parental surrogates; she does honor Aunt Abby her adoptive aunt at the Bellmonts’ home and she is attentive to James Belmont, whom she loves. She also listens to advice given to her by Mr. Belmont. Number four is: “*Love your brothers and sisters*” (7). Frado is separated from her biological siblings, but in the Belmont house she is kind to Jane and supportive of Jane’s marriage to George. Frado does not honor Mary Belmont. Mary at one point throws a knife at

Frado because she believes, though sick, Frado is not moving quickly enough: “‘Saucy, impudent nigger, you! Is [this] the way you answer me?’ and taking a large carving knife from the table, she hurled it, in her rage, at the defenceless (*sic*) girl” (36). Frado is also instrumental in helping James’s wife; Frado is a great favorite in the family despite Mrs. Bellmont’s and Mary’s attempt to eclipse her.

In *Advice to Sabbath School Children* number five is “*Reverence the Lord’s Day*” (8), which Frado tries to do but Mrs. Bellmont insists that giving Frado a day off to go to church is impossible—Frado must work. Mr. Bellmont says that he “. . . thought you Christians held to going to church. . . .” (49), and Mrs. Bellmont responds: “‘Yes, but who ever though of having a nigger go, except to drive others there?’” (49). Mrs. Bellmont allows Frado to drive them to church as a servant would, but then Frado must go home and do chores. If Frado could go to church, she would. Number six is: “*Read daily in the Bible*” (10). Frado does read the Bible and Mrs. Bellmont is sorry she allowed Frado go to school and become literate. She does not want Frado reading the Bible and becoming pious. Although Mrs. Bellmont wants Frado working and not reading the Bible, Frado has her tiny uncomfortable room: “But there was one little spot seldom penetrated by her mistress’ watchful eye: this was her room, uninviting and comfortless; but to herself a safe retreat. Here she would listen to the pleadings of a Savior, and try to penetrate the veil of doubt and sin which clouded her soul, and long to cast off the fetters of sin, and rise to the communion of saints” (48). Number seven in *Advice to Sabbath School Children* is: “*Pray to God constantly*” (11). One prayer Frado utters is: “God be merciful to me a sinner” (50). Frado is more abused than some slaves, but she considers herself a sinner. So parents in Milford who purchased copies of *Our Nig* for their children were most probably

interested in the religious didacticism in the novel; however, Frado's heroic suffering and freaky staging are evident to anyone who reads the text.

Number eight is: "*Take a cheerful part in the praises of God*" (12). Frado does have a cheerful personality. She entertains her classmates and breaks up the monotony of the classroom. She also teaches a willful sheep a lesson: "The willful sheep came furiously leaping and bounding far in advance of the flock. Just as he leaped for the dish, she suddenly jumped one side, when down he rolled into the river, and swimming across, remained alone till night. The men lay down, convulsed with laughter at the trick..." (31). Frado teaches the sheep who frequently knocks her down in his attempt to feed before the herd a lesson he will not soon forget. Number nine is "*Abhor swearing*" (13), which is not a problem because Frado does not swear or lie. And the last piece of advice, number ten is "*Avoid bad company*" (14). The last item is the hardest for Frado because she lives with Mrs. Bellmont and Mary and she cannot avoid their bad company. All in all Frado is a moral exemplar in this household. She works hard and only wants a little respect and kindness, and it is not easy to attain. *Our Nig's* readership was mostly children and Lurie in *Don't tell the Grown-ups* discusses subversive children's literature. *Our Nig* has some of the distinctive qualities Lurie discusses as elements of fairy tales: "Law and order are not always respected: the master thief fools the count and the parson, and Jack kills the giant and steals his treasure. Rich people are often unlucky, afflicted, or helpless: kings and queens cannot have children or suffer from strange illnesses, while the poor are healthy and enterprising and fortunate" (16). Law and order are not respected in Milford where Mrs. Bellmont enslaves and abuses a servant girl. In school Frado outsmarts Mary Bellmont. The Bellmonts, who are rich as compared to Frado, lose their beloved son James and their daughter Mary to strange illnesses. Frado is funny, smart, strong and poor and

through her novel she is fortunate enough to survive and outlive the Bellmonts. In terms of the fairy tale motif, Alison Lurie explains:

The simple, pleasant adult society they had prepared us for did not exist. As we had suspected, the fairy tales had been right all along—the world was full of hostile, stupid giants and perilous castles and people who abandoned their children in the nearest forest. To succeed in the world you needed some special skill or patronage, plus remarkable luck; and it didn't hurt to be very good-looking. (18)

Clearly the “hostile, stupid giants” are Mrs. Bellmont and Mary. Mrs. Bellmont is much larger than Frado when she arrives, but Mary’s giantess status comes from her perceived towering white superiority. The “perilous castle” is the enormous workload inside and out which Frado is expected to singlehandedly tackle—the Bellmont house. Her mother Mag and stepfather Seth do “abandon their children” and Frado is abandoned at an evil witch’s house. Frado as a child and young adult is physically strong; her mistress breaks Frado’s health by overworking her. And it is through neighbors’ purchasing copies of her book for their children that Frado supports herself. Throughout *Our Nig* Frado’s attractiveness is described, and therefore Mrs. Bellmont take steps to enfreak her by not allowing her to protect her skin from the sun and by cutting off Frado’s curls in an attempt to make her look ugly.

Robert Bogdan in *Freak Show* discusses the presentation of freaks to the audience and explains: “In the exotic mode the emphasis was on how different and, in most cases, inferior the person on exhibit was” (108). Frado in Wilson’s narrative is a rare case; clearly she is superior to Mary and Mrs. Bellmont. She is strong, works hard and though she is just a child, attempts to stick up for her self and help weaker members of the family when they too need protection from

Mrs. Belmont. She helps James die peacefully; she ensures he gets the needed attention at the end of his life and she longs to be in heaven next to him when she dies. Wilson is narrating her own story and what power Frado lacked in the Belmont home during her residence there, Wilson concretizes in her version of history by showing the freak child as superior to the white mistress in the novel. Frado's superior character does not change her freak status, however.

Harriet E. Wilson's work has autobiographical elements; she does construct herself as the freak Frado in the text. As Rosenberg in "Teaching Freaks" explains: "... there is no safe distance from the freaks or from one's own discomfoting responses" (307). Frado is freaky because of her mixed race, poverty, abandonment, her simultaneous child servant, child slave status, her strength and intelligence. She is the "outside talker" and presents herself this way. The writer in her becomes the freak performer.

Wilson writes to show us what she sees in society in 1859. Americans are grappling with the southern slavery issue, but pretending it has no repercussions in the north. The reaction of Mrs. Belmont and Mary to Frado's skin color speaks to the racism of the abolitionist north and explores the tension of what it means to be white, black or both in antebellum America. Frado inhabits that no man's land of miscegenation. Her white mother Mag is seduced and summarily ruined by a rich rake. As Karen Renner explains: "Indeed, by 1848 seduction was considered such a frequent crime against women that laws were enacted to criminalize it" (168). Frado's mother is a victim of seduction, and she descends into poverty. Frado suffers through her mother's downfall. How she is treated in abolitionist New Hampshire is cause for concern. Slavery has poisoned all facets of society, especially those who espouse religious creeds while abusing their free black servants.

Wilson's narrative is a constructed account of her world. As Joanne Melish explains: "By the eve of the Civil War, New England history had been re-envisioned as a triumphant narrative of free white labor in which free people of color were marooned as permanent, unaccountable strangers—a narrative that undergirded antebellum New England nationalism, placing New England in a position of moral authority . . ." (655). Harriet E. Wilson's narrative undermines New England's nationalism. Through Frado's story the reader perceives northerners as at least as culpable if not worse than the southern slaveholders. As Goldner in "Arguing With Pictures" explains: "Because the Fugitive Slave Act helped to clarify the North's entanglement with slavery, Northern abolitionists sought to 'witness' against slavery: to confront slavery and to make their positions known to others. Yet the institution was visible only at a distance, in the South" (72). Not exactly true as Wilson's text ensures slavery's shadow is visible in New Hampshire. Perhaps that is why abolitionists sought to hide her text. Levander in "The Science of Sentiment," explains: "According to this popular nineteenth-century scientific view, each child 'recapitulates' its nation's particular evolutionary history and, in so doing, is afforded the opportunity to 'suppress' its nation's 'useless past' (464) and to 'purify' its ancestors' 'animal nature'" (33). On the eve of the Civil War Wilson's text throws a wrench into the abolitionists' machine. She illuminates the myth of the happy free slave of the north. *Our Nig* highlights the failure of the young nation to "suppress its . . . useless past" and move forward. Through her abusive treatment Wilson's showcases herself as a freak and Mrs. Belmont and Mary as embracing rather than purifying their "animal nature." Within the pages of this novel we see caged animals released and their abuse of the freakish other serves as a didactic example of the northern hypocrisy and the failure of the young country to live up to its founding documents' promising freedom for all.

Henry Lewis Gates's discovery of Harriet Wilson as the author of *Our Nig*'s and his subsequent astonishment that the first novel written by a northern black woman did not cause a stir when it was published is understandable. Wilson enters the racial fray before the Civil War and adds her voice to slave narratives written by Henry Box Brown, Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs's, and abolitionist texts like Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but the twist is Wilson is not a slave; the shock comes when readers realize Wilson is free and lives in the north. This fact alone should have spurred sales of the novel. Wilson's novel is an extension of herself, and as such defies classification. It is not a slave narrative written by a slave, but a slave narrative written by a free slave woman who resides in abolitionist territory. Gates explains that her text was veritably ignored and anonymous. Gardner in "This Attempt of Their Sister" explains: "My research into the publishing history of *Our Nig* suggests not only that abolitionists knew about the book but that they may have consciously chosen not to publicize it" (227). Gardner explains that the readership for Wilson's novel consisted of "... primarily white, middle-class readers who lived close to Wilson's home in Milford, New Hampshire" (227-8). Gardner also discovered that most of her readers were young indicating that *Our Nig* may have been published as a child's book (238). The freak show once again tells us more about the viewers or in this case the readers than the freaks. *Our Nig* was published as a local exposé to educate young neighbors about corruption in their midst. It is not hard to understand why northern abolitionists, a few years before shots are fired at Fort Sumter signaling the start of the Civil War, would hide this narrative of what slaves had to look forward to once they were freed. Wilson's text is truly subversive as Frado is staged as a carnival freak and Stewart in *On Longing* explains: "The participant in carnival is swept up in the events carnival presents and he or she thereby experiences the possibility of misrule and can thereby envision it as a new order" (108). Readers

swept up in carnival could envision the Bellmonts as corrupt and Frado as heroic; they could see free black servants as superior and enact a new order wherein the current hierarchy is switched or at the very least reordered. Wilson's text is subversive children's literature.

Wilson, through her work, enables readers to experience a bildungsroman of a racially mixed young servant. This book was given as gifts to children and the nation was characterized as youthful during the antebellum period, therefore as America attempted to put into practice its articulated founding documents namely: "All men are created equal," so Wilson attempted to articulate herself into the national dialogue. She does not come with a congratulatory national narrative, but with a story that questions our founding tenets as Frado questions God in the novel. She presents a novel in which northern abolitionists are indicted; she writes an autobiography which calls attention to abandoned women during the Victorian time period when they had little opportunity to successfully support themselves and their children; she tells a story of a young mulatto girl's enfreakment. Wilson's story is mirrored by slave narratives, sentimental novelists, and by women in Stowe's antislavery text. Frado is abandoned; Frado is abused; Frado is separated from her mother, and many slave families were similarly fractured; Frado is abandoned by her husband, and left to fend for herself and her son. Frado's son dies. The unhappy story is told; Frado's story survives through Wilson's novel. As Barbara Smith in "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism" states: "For books to be real and remembered they have to be talked about" (188). Wilson publishes her novel and allows readers to talk about a freak exhibit inspired by Barnum. In "Staring at the Other" Rosemarie Garland Thomson states: "The story of the Christ child's birth, for example, can be understood as a convergence of prodigious events. The star of Bethlehem is the comet—a common prodigy foretelling the future--signals the wise men that a prodigious birth has taken place and that they should travel to witness the extraordinary body as

a conduit to truth.” *Our Nig* is published in 1859 when the country is experiencing “a convergence of prodigious events” before the start of the Civil War. Wilson’s novel engenders a monstrous truth that the north is as darkened as the south by slavery’s shadow. Smith explains, “For books to be understood they must be examined in such a way that the basic intentions of the writers are at least considered” (“Toward a Black Feminist Criticism” 188). Wilson ensures we understand her text as an exposé of antebellum hypocrisies. It is through the torture and abuse of Frado’s body that readers come to understand the whipping of Frado’s “. . . body as a conduit to the truth” about how pervasive, poisonous, and all encompassing slavery is in antebellum America.

Conclusion: Child Freaks: What can they teach?

“Carrying the crescent child that carries its own full mother in its belly . . .” Walt Whitman (“Song of Myself” 794).

What can these freaks teach us? The way authors stage freak children in these novels validates the pervasive influence of P.T. Barnum in nineteenth century American culture. Walt Whitman in “Song of Myself” uses an image of the crescent moon, which can explain child freaks in these novels; these freaks are crescent moon children. They are, “Carrying the crescent child that carries its own full mother in its belly” (51). The freak child performs an amazing feat by carrying “its own full [cultural] mother in its belly.” The crescent moon freaks reshape and change adults’ minds about the state of the world. Wordsworth states, “The Child is father of the Man” (7), and in antebellum America these crescent moon freaks are mothers of mankind, and although they are only children, they carry the whole culture in their bellies.

Freaks are participants in the carnivalesque and Stewart in *On Longing* explains: “The participant in carnival . . . can thereby envision it as a new order” (107-108). Margaret, Jack the Prig and the Image, Pearl, Topsy and Frado through their freaky experiences allow readers to “envision . . . a new order.” It is through the child that adults become educated. Wordsworth’s influential poem “Intimations of Immortality” had an enormous impact on nineteenth century thought, as Barbara Garlitz explains (648). Children were thought to be more recently with God than adults, therefore the children know better of divine intentions than adults do. These child freaks highlight adult corruption and enlighten readers.

In Tod Browning’s film *Freaks* the words onscreen at the start of the film state: “With humility for the many injustices done to such people (they have no power to control their lot) we present the most startling horror story of the ABNORMAL and THE UNWANTED.” Leslie

Fiedler calls the foreword added to the movie: “. . . a hilarious piece of pop mythology . . .” (*Freaks* 296). However, the descriptive phrase used to categorize freaks as “abnormal and unwanted” is accurate. Clearly the freak children discussed in this study are presented as abnormal and unwanted, and as children they do not have power to control how they came into the world or how they are received in their respective communities. In the novels investigated here: Sylvester Judd’s *Margaret*, George Thompson’s *City Crimes*, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and Harriet E. Wilson’s *Our Nig*, the authors utilize P.T. Barnum’s freak shows to attract readers to the text and entertain them. As Rosenberg in “Teaching Freaks” explains regarding his course entitled “Freaks”: “. . . I hoped to problematize the word by turning its implications and, more broadly, the very impulses that attracted students to the course, into one subject of the course itself: to entice them into the freak show and then to ask them why they were there” (304). In a similar way, Phineas Taylor Barnum’s adept marketing skills implemented by the novelists in this study, take the freak show experience a step further: each novelist in his/her work tells us why we are at the freak show, who the respective freaks are, and what we are supposed to learn about ourselves and our society through the experience of watching freaks. One of Barnum’s partners plays a joke on Barnum and nearly has him lynched. When Barnum asks him why he did it he says: “Remember, all we need to insure success is notoriety” (*Struggles and Triumphs* 85). The freaks in this study ensure the success of the novel through their notoriety and encapsulate an era.

Sylvester Judd stages the protagonist Margaret as a freakish outsider. She is adopted by drunken misfits at the Pond and partially derives her freak status from them. The townspeople refer to Margaret as an Injin and the freak child is viewed as abnormal because she is seen constantly accompanied by her gigantic dog, Bull, which as Fiedler explains: “. . .the dog. Long

associated with the Devil...” (*Freaks* 76), and Margaret is known to cohabit with wild bears. She takes honey from bees and is not stung. She is an American wild child who has visions of God and christens her land with Biblical names. Her story is a bildungsroman wherein the most outlandish, unwanted Indian freak founds a society and geographically redirects the town so that Indian Head and the Pond become the heart of Livingston. The abnormal, unwanted Indian freak starts out as a notorious outsider and saves the town.

Jack the Prig and the Image in Thompson’s *City Crimes* upend the notion of the angel in the house and the cult of domesticity. In these freaks’ lives the Dead Man and his vampiric wife are the demons in this house and the home is the crypt-like Dark Vaults. The freaks are abused and robbed of their youth and future prospects by their poisonous parents and the murderous *Jolly Knights of the Round Table*. Jack and the Image are groomed as criminals in training. Thompson utilizes these freaks to highlight what lies beneath the façade of the cult of domesticity, which he portrays as available to the haves, not the have-nots. Jack and his freakishly deformed dwarf brother are abnormal and unwanted. In *On Longing* Stewart states: “The dwarf is assigned to the domain of the grotesque and the underworld . . .” (111), and in this case the dwarf’s criminal brother Jack is relegated to the underworld as well. The Image is caged most of the time and he never sees the light of day—his body is deformed. His future is nonexistent; his growth is stunted and he is inarticulate except when he howls like a wild animal. In “Song of Myself” Whitman says: “I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable / I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world” (1331-1332). Whitman’s wildness is a positive pose, whereas the Image’s “barbaric yawp” is monstrous and a sign of devolution. The Image howls in the depths of the underground vaults and he is ignored by the mainstream, and Thompson attempts to translate the horror of the Image’s situation. “In the realm of the sublime,

the upwardly transcendent finds its mirror-image in the downwardly monstrous . . .” (Kearney 489). Whitman’s “upwardly transcendent” yawp mirrors the Image’s “downwardly monstrous” yawp. George Thompson’s utilization of Barnum’s techniques allows us a peek at the country’s future prospects if everyone is not given an equal stab at the country’s wealth. These freaks symbolize hopelessness. Jack is a great thief and will someday be a murderer just like his father. The Image is a monster utilized by the Dead Man to torture his imprisoned victims. The child symbolizes the country and these freaks chart a future of degradation, decay, and depravity. Thompson’s freak show is a dark, depressing cautionary tale for all children of the republic. It is a working class manifesto, which shocks the reader into action in order to save future children from the freaks’ fate. There is a fairy tale ending for the protagonist Frank Sydney, but not for the freak children—the newlyweds do not want to adopt the freaks. Huck Finn strikes out for the territory at the end of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* because he does not want to be “sivilized”: “But I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she’s going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can’t stand it. I been there before” (388). Huck desires freedom on his own terms. However, Jack the Prig and the Image have no such chance of escape; they are summarily flushed into the sewers, abandoned, unwanted, forever barbaric residents confined beneath the city in the Dark Vaults.

Uncivilized and exiled, Pearl in Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* will always be the wild child exhibited as a precocious goblin who divines truths. Whereas Barnum scoured the earth to bring back exotic others to be shown in America, after Pearl’s father kisses her and breaks the spell, Hawthorne sends her to a foreign country. The freak is too fractured for nineteenth century sensibilities and in a Barnumesque reversal, after her performance, she is exiled not imported. Her enormous wealth cannot even purchase a place in the Puritan community. The fact that she

is staged as a demon child, a lawless sprite, a goblin, and a taboo guarantees her banishment. Whereas her mother leaves the community then returns, Pearl is such a freak that she can only be exiled, as the demonic freak is perceived as abnormal and unwanted in the Puritan community, so Pearl is secreted away to an undisclosed country. As Fiedler explains in *Freaks* for a girl to awaken from a nightmare, she must wake up and/or grow up: “Only then can a girl be ‘queened,’ and thus entering into full womanhood, distinguish the real from the make-believe, the human from the pseudo-human.” (31). It would have been impossible for Pearl to see herself as normal in the Puritan community; she would always be a “pseudo-human” there. Pearl is kissed by her father and awakened from the spell, but we never see her grow up.

Hawthorne embodies nineteenth century concerns in the freak child Pearl. Who are we as a country mid-century? Who is Pearl? Where did she come from? What defines America? What part of our past do we want to keep and what part do we want to expunge? The questions we ask of Pearl are questions Hawthorne is asking of antebellum America. The Puritans are part of who we were; we carry what we want and unload what we want to forget, and revise what we want to change. Hawthorne’s novel is concerned with antebellum issues of self definition and a past which must be re-envisioned in order to successfully progress. Part of that re-envisioning is to exile the freak.

Stowe’s novel exhibits slaves as freaks. Topsy is the most memorable and the whip marks on her back allow readers to experience the scarring of slaves and the deep scars slavery imprints on the country’s psyche. Topsy symbolizes the unsettling of a country and the wild child presents these hard issues in a humorous way. St. Clare laughs at Ophelia’s instruction of the child: “St. Clare took the same kind of amusement in the child that a man might in the tricks of a parrot or a pointer” (273). What has slavery done to the country? How and why have we

allowed it to continue? How do we ensure slaves will become contributing members of society? Harriet Beecher Stowe does offer some solutions. She has Miss Ophelia get involved with Topsy in order to educate and eventually accept the freak child. In a young rapidly growing country slavery helped propel the southern economy, but at what cost to slaves, masters and the nation? Stowe's solution of educating Topsy and having her become a missionary in Africa exports the problem of what to do with the slaves who are freed who cannot and do not want to be shipped off to another country as missionaries. Topsy leaves the country; George, Eliza and Harry escape to Canada and eventually travel to Liberia. It is not possible to ship offshore our slavery problems. Slaves must be equitably integrated into society and educated; Stowe's novel steeped in its time shows fear of this kind of assimilation.

It is noteworthy that Stowe's text was wildly successful whereas Harriet E. Wilson's was marketed locally and was virtually unknown. Wilson's friends and people who wanted to help her purchased the text for their children to read. Frado's freakishness is different from other wild children in this study because Frado stages herself. Wilson writes and markets her own story. Although it is not a best seller, it survives. Wilson presents the white mistress as a monster and through her narrative she drives home the fact that slavery is everyone's problem. She presents the north and south as intimately connected as if antebellum America could be envisioned as the Siamese twins Chang and Eng Bunker. The twins appear to be almost separate as they have their own arms, legs, heads, bodies and even their own families, but they are intimately connected at the sternum. In a similar fashion, the north and south are inseparably enfreaked by the monster slavery. Slavery is the North's problem too as Frado's abhorrent abuse proves. Slavery is a monster the whole country needs to confront and does in the Civil War.

Margaret in Judd's novel and Frado in Wilson's text remain members of their communities and citizens of their country. Thompson's freaks wind up underground, undetected and ignored. Pearl and Topsy are propelled to foreign lands. These novels appear to be conversing with each other in the fourteen years their publication dates span. Some authors attempt to find solutions some advocate escaping or exiling the nation's problems, and some authors, like Judd, see that part of America's history is that there is room here for all, like at the nation's all welcoming table at the end of *Margaret*.

The importance of investigating novels is that the novel is itself a democratic form and newspapers and popular ephemera permeate this literary genre ensuring various voices are heard. Hawthorne's journals show that his experience people watching and newspaper reading influenced his characterization of Pearl, Dimmesdale, Chillingworth and Hester. Hawthorne was a noted newspaper enthusiast and his reverend rake character, Dimmesdale, is humanized in Hawthorne's portrayal of this type. Novels are about ordinary people and in this study extraordinary freak children populate the fiction in a kid show and offer the reader a wondrous educative reading experience. In "'Have You Read...?': Real Readers and Their Responses in Antebellum Boston and Its Region" the fact that readers were discerning and sought reading material that was realistic and informative is noted. Men and women read together while performing other tasks: "Much of the time they read—or listened to others read—while performing tasks such as sewing or cooking. Their reportage included not only other women but also the men and boys in their families and friendship circles" (Zboray 141). The American public was highly literate as Ryan explains: "Literacy had, in fact, grown rapidly between the American Revolution and 1840, when ninety percent of the native-born, male and female, could

read and write” (*The Empire of the Mother* 14), and it is an important piece in the nation building puzzle to probe what Americans were reading and why they were so attracted to freaks in novels.

What is different about antebellum America is the country has a second chance at paradise; it is a second chance to start over with room to attempt to fix its mistakes. Novels echo democratic voices from myriad sources; this young republic is peopled with the world’s refuse as Emma Lazarus’s poem “The New Colossus” states: “the wretched refuse of your teeming shore” (12), and the children here are unlike children anywhere else. America is unlike any other country. There is something freaky about the youth here exemplified in the frontier, the wilderness, the ragged newsboys, and the forest, which is internalized in the American psyche whether or not people live in cities or the country. In Schama’s “America’s Verdant Cross” the amazing discovery of the big trees in California is discussed. “The big Trees were thus seen as the botanical correlate of America’s heroic nationalism at a time when the Republic was suffering its most divisive crisis since the Revolution” (36). At mid-nineteenth century the sequoias were believed to be the oldest thing on the face of the earth and they were thought to symbolize America’s consecrated mission. They concretized visions of manifest destiny and enabled Americans to view themselves as a chosen people. “Even Horace Greeley, who saw them in 1859 and tried hard not to be impressed, was startled by the thought that they had stood upright ‘when David danced before the Ark; when Theseus ruled Athens; when Aeneas fled from the burning wreck of Troy’” (Schama 36). There is something special about this land, which reaches from ocean to ocean. As Susan Stewart describes it: “The idea of a ‘New World,’ the enormity of the wilderness . . .” (99), shapes people here. The children here are special due to the unique landscape and opportunities. The trees afforded the nation “. . . a second chance for America to understand the divinity inscribed in its landscape” (Schama 39), and the child is the

country, and the country is the child. This is the landscape of the wild American child who symbolizes endless possibilities. One can begin as a freak here and found a utopia, disappear in the Dark Vaults, save corrupt sinners, become a missionary, or write and publish a biography. This is a circus of mostly successful freak-child performers. When Barnum started his American Museum he thought about the endless possibilities and worked hard to advertise his establishment correctly. Even bad publicity was publicity nonetheless. He says: "... I weighed the matter well in my mind, and was convinced that I could present to the American public such a variety, quantity and quality of amusement, blended with instruction . . ." (*Struggles and Triumphs* 135), and so he does. These novels do the same. They offer freak show amusement "blended with instruction" available even when one is not visiting New York, or when the circus is not in town; the novel is always available to entertain and one admission fee ensures access to endless performances.

Rosenman explains contemporary views of the novel: "Now the novel is almost completely forgotten. On the rare occasions when modern critics take note of it, they tend to dismiss it precisely because of its damning popularity. It has been regarded as a banal piece of popular culture, a category whose appeal is assumed to reside in its conventionality" (32).²¹⁸ What is wrong with studying works that were popular and why does popularity have such a negative reception in academic circles?

In "Spectacular Women" Rosenman says, "The deliberate courting of pleasure...is important cultural 'work to do'" (33). The Barnumesque staging and voyeuristic viewing of child freaks does important cultural work. In almost all cases the freaks on display are superior

²¹⁸ Ellen Bayuk Rosenman, "Spectacular Women: The Mysteries of London and the Female Body," *Victorian Studies* 40.1 (1996): 31-64.

to those around them who have come to view the show. Whereas William Wordsworth encapsulates the Romantic wild child with the lines: “The Child is father of the Man” (7), in this country the American freak child maternally engenders adults and instructs them regarding: “...the normality of Freaks, the freakishness of the normal, the precariousness and absurdity of being, however we define it, fully human” (*Freaks* 347).

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