

These People Are Different; or, Horatio Alger's Ethnic  
Americans

by

Joseph D. Kondela

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## ABSTRACT

"These People are Different; or, Horatio Alger's Ethnic Americans" demonstrates that Horatio Alger, Jr. contributed to American cultural perceptions of non-Anglo Americans. In his writing he projected a negative attitude toward anyone foreign to his own Anglo-American background including African-Americans, Irish, Scots, Italians, French, and Germans. To Alger these people were of different fiber and were unequal to his heroes because of their origins. Alger's chosen medium, the juvenile novel, ensured that his ethnic agenda passed into American culture. His young audience was susceptible to accepting Alger's stereotypes of the non-Anglos, especially considering the believability of his novels. That realism caused concern among his critics who feared that his enticing propositions of success would lead his readers to seek unreachable fortune. Similarly, as Alger prodded his readers to adopt his ideas of material success he also influenced their opinions of ethnic Americans. It was that interjection of ethnic typing that made Horatio Alger's novels a noteworthy part of American culture.

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Introduction

Historians, literary critics and bibliophiles have studied the works of Horatio Alger, Jr. for their value as teaching tools and for their influence over generations of adolescents. Alger, an ordained Unitarian minister and member of a well established New England Anglo-American family, included in his stories moral instructions for his young readers.<sup>1</sup> He warned that association with certain types would lead to failure or at least hardship. He advised his readers to avoid gaming and corruption and scorned those associated with such vices. He preached that reform was possible and that those caught up in immoral activities could realize success, but only through abandonment of undesirable habits.<sup>2</sup> Alger also admonished his readers about what values were advantageous to them. He stressed hard work, honesty, perseverance, and loyalty to family and friends. Emphasizing this association with a "better class of people," Alger guaranteed the spoils of success to the hero of the story and to those who believed in his advice. Both Alger's heroes and his readers desired nothing less than the success indicated by social



ascendance.<sup>3</sup> These and other qualities were part of Alger's prescription for prosperity. This blueprint was only a prospect, however, and not reality. Weighed against the social stratification of his day, Alger's promised reward was virtually unreachable.<sup>4</sup>

Studying Alger in this dimension reveals the historic importance of his work as a contribution to American culture. Not only were his books a significant part of America's material culture with regards to trends in distribution, production, and availability of the dime-novel, but they also were important for their influence on the actions of readers. The books urged young people to formulate opinions of unseen places based on Alger's interpretation. Readers followed his advice for success and met fates based on the realities of class structure and advancement opportunities. The impact of Alger's stories was evident in the criticism of his work by contemporaries. His inconsistent and often turgid writing style, coupled with unrealistic prospects of success, led critics to warn that he was corrupting his readers with "endless drivel." Critics pushed for the removal of Alger's books from public libraries in order to protect youths from this negative influence.<sup>5</sup>

Analysts from his day normally praised Alger for his efforts with comments such as "...his portrayals of street life in the great metropolis are true to the life, and naturally enkindle the enthusiasm of the old as well as the

young."<sup>6</sup> But criticism existed and centered on Alger's literary merit, or lack thereof. Often that commentary was in regard to Alger's stagnant and repetitive plots. One writer noted that Alger's stories were merely slight variances "stuffed over the same skeleton."<sup>7</sup>

Many of his contemporary reviewers, however, had more specific views of Alger and feared that his writing was corrosive to the moral character and education of young readers. One such critic blasted Alger for giving his African-American characters a "Babel of Dialect."<sup>8</sup> Another reviewer feared that Alger would influence his readers with "false notions of the character[s]" about which he wrote.<sup>9</sup> One more critic offered similar sentiments when he said of Alger; "He could not possibly be more puerile in the selection of characters or more clumsy in their delineation. We hope boys are not to be satisfied with such poor stuff as this."<sup>10</sup> These commentators demonstrated their displeasure with Alger's writing. One of their colleagues, however, put such feelings into more poignant words and sent a message to all; "We must recognize the fact that they (Alger's stories) have taken possession of the mind of the ordinary unreflective boy with a strong hold."<sup>11</sup> He, like his fellow critics, feared that readers would accept Alger's inaccurate messages and descriptions.

This critical opposition provided, ironically, an indication of the importance of Alger's work. Had his stories been unbelievable fiction no concern would have

surfaced. This was not the case as he based his stories closely on realistic circumstances and critics voiced concerns that exposure to Alger books would result in foolish actions by readers. Avoiding sensational stories and circumstances in his writing was an intention of Alger as he knew the influence the writer had over his readers.<sup>12</sup> He and his critics understood that readers had the potential to re-enact the stories, not in a dramatic sense but in hopes of attaining Algerian success.

The readership that the critics hoped to protect was as diverse as his stories were uniform. Advances in publication and distribution took Alger to the bookshelves of libraries across the nation and into the hands of impressionable young people. Reading was no longer a leisure activity of the well-to-do, but one of the working class as well. These trends in publishing raised the concerns of critics as the formerly un-read classes as well as all young readers tended to more readily accept fiction as reality. A critic noted that the "young and ignorant enough--and of the latter there are countless numbers in the country districts--do and will absorb this sort of pabulum."<sup>13</sup>

Critics were also concerned that Alger's works functioned as guide books for new visitors to the urban setting, and lured the adventurous and vulnerable away from their homes. Alger included precise details of landmarks and the built environment of the cities in which he placed

his stories. The novels became advertisements for the cities to the rural populations who read them and ventured into the actual locations which Alger portrayed. He told these people about the prospects that lay before them should they try their luck at social ascendancy. For these adventurers Alger provided a guide concerning "what to do, where to go, how to begin, and how to proceed in the city." The newcomer to the city could learn about modes of transportation and ways to find employment and lodging, simply by following the Alger formula.<sup>14</sup> Conversely, as Alger provided useful directions to beneficial services in the urban area, he also warned of the harmful areas of the metropolis.<sup>15</sup>

Alger's works were not only good keys to the physical structure of the city, they were also usable guides to the individuals who resided there. He offered the readers ideas about whom to trust and whom to avoid. His books based on the assumption "Good company in books was as important as good company in persons" told readers how to judge people of good character.<sup>16</sup> Alger represented the ideal of morality in his hero, and its antithesis in the confidence man and other corrupt people.<sup>17</sup> Alger did not, however, limit his personal judgments and biased descriptions to persons identifiable only by occupation. In his writing he made prejudicial comments about many of the ethnic groups who were increasingly visible during his lifetime. Although Alger wrote in hopes of influencing the elimination of class

barriers, he maintained stereotypes and dictated to his readers which ethnic groups could transgress the social and economic boundaries.<sup>18</sup> Alger wrote of his opinion of non-Anglos and categorized them as unable to achieve the fruits of his formula for success.

Compared to the attention they have given to his themes of success and moral instruction, scholars have written little concerning Alger's treatment of ethnic Americans. One writer, Carol Nackenoff, the most recent to write about Alger, gave some attention to the plight of ethnic Americans, but did not explore Alger's opinion significantly. She limited her assessment to mentioning the stereotypes proposed by Alger but did not elaborate on those characterizations. Nackenoff noted that Alger cast Jews as usurers and the Irish as bullies and thugs.<sup>19</sup> Alger also, according to Nackenoff, introduced Scots as thrifty, Italians as unable to achieve assimilation, and African-Americans as simple minded and childish.<sup>20</sup> Other Alger authorities have mentioned some of his ethnic considerations, but more sparsely than Nackenoff. Gary Scharnhorst noted Alger's inclusion of three immigrant heroes in his stories, but only "Lest Alger suffer the accusation that he ignored the plight of the immigrant poor."<sup>21</sup> Scharnhorst also mentioned that Alger opposed slavery as did many of his fellow Unitarians, but this did not translate into an acceptance of former slaves as equals.

Reading Alger reveals his obsession with identifying the different ethnic groups. He saturated his works with examples of ethnic Americans who at times served no real purpose other than as counterbalances to the examples of the morally upright heroes. Among the ethnic types that Alger most often characterized were African-Americans, Irish, Scots, Italians, Germans, and French. His treatment of ethnics ranged from conditional acceptance of their presence in America, welcoming them if they displayed admirable qualities, to portrayals as failures and purveyors of immorality and dishonesty. One thing was clear in Alger's accounts, these people were not equal to his heroes nor to the established Anglo-American population. In the absence of any traditional records of his bias, such as speeches or letters, Alger's novels illustrate his opinion of ethnic Americans.

Analysis of a random sample of Alger's works demonstrates how he typed ethnic Americans.<sup>22</sup> He achieved this, not only by providing consistent characterization of certain groups, but also by providing sparse examples of peoples that contained identifiable and unforgettable characteristics. He exemplified differences in languages as well as cultural variables to create his own standards of ethnic Americans. When he did not mention the heritage of a character, he attached an ethnically recognizable name to the individual. The end result was literature that demonstrated Horatio Alger's opinion of non-Anglo Americans

and offered that view to millions of American youth. He sent a strong message that non-Anglos were not "American" and that assimilation into Anglo-American society was the key for their survival and success. Of the ethnic Americans, Alger told his young readers, these people are different.

Alger's novels reflected the different attitudes on Alger and he reflected this in the manner of depicting the various ethnic groups. In his stories, Alger was a group to which Alger gave consistently positive attention. The characters were first defined by their ethnicity: African-American, Spanish, Italian, and French. Alger's bias varied from group to group. This bias shows both the progression and variance of Alger's ethnic typing and the similarities and dissimilarities of his bias.

The novel Alger attacked to his Greeks, such as Spenser and Patsyline, after naming as Jewish descent, but he did not connect the stereotyping characters with attitudes that suggested that that was the case. Alger noted the Germans as enemies, such as Spenser, and he had a propensity toward violence. He sometimes, however, gave them qualities which he praised, which would have been business sense. Alger indicated the presence of the Jewish and rural Germans in America during his novels by including them as characters in his stories. He did not include them as characters in his stories, but he did include them as characters in his stories. He did not include them as characters in his stories, but he did include them as characters in his stories. He did not include them as characters in his stories, but he did include them as characters in his stories.

## From American Boy to Stupid Dutchman; The Germans

Alger's treatment of ethnic types was not consistent; he did not give all of them "equal time" in his novels. Different ethnic Americans had different impacts on Alger and he reflected this in the amount of attention he gave each group in his stories. Germans were a group to which Alger gave relatively little attention. Studying the Germans first, followed by the French, African-Americans, Scottish, Italians, and Irish, shows how Alger's bias varied from group to group. This form shows both the progression and variances of Alger's ethnic typing and the similarities and consistencies of his bias.

The names Alger attached to his Germans, such as Brandes and Schickling, often hinted at Jewish descent, but he did not surround the corresponding characters with contexts that suggested that that was the case. Alger marked his Germans as stubborn, rude, boisterous, and having a propensity toward violence. He sometimes, however, gave them qualities which he praised, mainly thrift and good business sense. Alger indicated the presence of both urban and rural Germans in America during his lifetime by including them as characters in his stories, mostly in incidental circumstances that had no impact on the plot of the stories. But even though they had no real role in the



fate of the books' heroes, Alger highlighted his Germans and the stereotypes with which he endowed them.

The presence of German immigrants in America was important and Alger indicated this in several stories; one of these was *Tom the Boot Black* (1880). In this story Tom, the hero, was employed in a store in Cincinnati, Ohio. Alger informed the reader that Tom learned to speak German to facilitate his business with "the number of German customers" that he encountered.<sup>1</sup> Alger indicated an acceptance and almost appreciation of Germans. He not only confirmed the German presence, but did not comment on the nature of their character. This was indicative of a neutral attitude toward Germans in general. In another episode, Alger was also nonpartisan toward the German heritage. In *Adrift in New York; or, Tom and Florence Braving the World* (1889) Alger referred to a Madam Berger whom the hero of the story wished to visit.<sup>2</sup> Even though she was the bearded lady of a side show, she was acceptable to Alger and he did not consider her a bad influence on his hero. Despite her freakish occupation, the author did not comment on her heritage or means of survival.

Other characters within Alger's stories indicated the author's acceptance of Germans, but with stereotypes attached to their identities. Such a case was that of John Schickling. In *The Young Salesman* (1894 - 1895) Schickling appeared as an angry young boy, incensed that one of the villains of the story swindled his mother out of rent money.

After the hero, English immigrant Scott Walton, met Schickling he replied to the German boy, "You are the first American boy that I have met."<sup>3</sup> This indicated that the author considered the German boy, and others of his heritage, capable of attaining equal consideration as a citizen. Characters such as Schickling, however, exemplified Alger's conditional acceptance of non-Anglos. Alger described Schickling as an "American Boy" through an English immigrant. Uttered by Scott Walton, the words "American Boy" did not necessarily indicate the author's belief in classifying all residents of America as "Americans."

Alger also added to the readers cultural perception of Germans by including a physical description of Schickling. When Alger first introduced John Schickling he spoke directly to the reader saying that Schickling was "A dark haired, pleasant looking boy, whose face seemed to indicate German descent."<sup>4</sup> Alger noted a definite physical difference between his own Anglo-American heritage and Germans. Although physical characteristics among ethnic groups may have been consistent, Alger's use of such descriptions contributed to his spread of stereotypes. By identifying Schickling as German, in physical description and by name, Alger marked the young character as different from himself and from the hero. Schickling's German identity drew attention to his actions, so that the reader

associated his physical appearance and mannerisms with his heritage.

Although these examples suggested that Alger had a generally acceptable opinion of German-Americans, other stories indicated that he had a more negative opinion of these people. These less flattering portrayals demonstrated a range of behaviors, from simple inconsiderateness to crudeness and aggression. In *Andy Gordon; or, The Fortunes of a Young Janitor* (1881), Alger mentioned a character named Louis Schick. By this account Schick was the local "busy-body." He offered an unsolicited message to Andy Gordon, the hero, informing him that a package for Mrs. Gordon had arrived at the local post office. At first Schick appeared as a helpful messenger, but the episode unfolded to show that Schick was the only one with any knowledge of the package. The post office clerk, who also ran the general store and was understandably busy and distracted, had no knowledge of the package, and was surprised to hear of its arrival from Andy.<sup>5</sup> Here Alger painted a mildly disturbing picture of Germans. Schick was not a friend to the hero, only an acquaintance. His actions indicated that Germans were meddlesome and transgressive. His behavior was unwarranted, although later appreciated as the package contained information that led the hero to his fortune.

Alger included other examples of improper behavior by this group of new Americans in additional stories. He

included a minor German character in *Bob Burton; or The Young Ranchman of the Missouri* (1886-1887).<sup>6</sup> Alger identified this young man, Otto Brandes, as "A German boy" and marked him with extortion and stubbornness. Aaron Wolverton, the villain, beckoned Brandes, the pilot of a small skiff, to row him to the boat of Bob Burton so that he could prevent the departure of the hero. Brandes refused to accept the task for payment of five cents. He also refused the sum of ten cents, before insisting on and receiving the sum of twenty-five cents, and that only in advance.<sup>7</sup> His insistence on the final sum, and his insistence on advance payment reflected a demanding and extortive, albeit frugal, character. The task which Wolverton requested was not difficult, nonetheless Brandes took advantage of his employer's urgency.

In the episode of Otto Brandes Alger demonstrated an extortive German boy. One may, however conclude that Brandes displayed thrift, a quality which Alger hoped his readers would adopt. He included definite stereotypes of thrifty and money conscious Germans in other stories. In *The Young Salesman* he included an incidental passage which marked one such person as a shrewd businessman. He characterized Herr Muller, a store-keeper encountered by the hero, as a keen merchant, despite the inadequate size of his business and market area.<sup>8</sup> Alger also included other characters of German descent that possessed the trait of economy. John Schickling of *The Young Salesman* appeared as

a compromise of the characters of Brandes and Muller. Schickling was persistent in his attempt to secure money owed his mother by a former tenant of her boarding house.<sup>9</sup> He displayed the stubbornness of Brandes, but with good business in mind, like Muller. He obviously was not as successful as Muller but attempted to balance his and his mother's receipts; and, unlike Brandes, his persistence in garnering money was because it was owed him. His fellow German boy, Brandes, inflated the price of his services with no claim to the money he extracted from Wolverton.

Alger marked Schick, Brandes, Muller, and Schickling with mild stereotypes. Another character, in contrast, was the victim of more harsh typing by Alger. He not only attributed actions and qualities to Otto Schmidt of *Jed the Poorhouse Boy* (1892), but also figured him with physical attributes and peculiar speech identifiable as German.<sup>10</sup> "A stout man with red hair," Schmidt was a visual representation of the German stereotype. Schmidt also possessed Alger's model of German speech; he entered the story screaming to the owner of the sales house "I want my money back... you are a big *schwindler*."<sup>11</sup> This was the beginning of an episode that included several stereotypes of Germans. Schmidt:

...was a large man, evidently a German, weighing not less than two hundred pounds. He approached Hugo Higgins [the owner of the store, accused swindler, and a man of short stature], towering above the dwarf by at least fourteen inches and shook his fist in his

face. Mr. Higgins shrank back as if fearful of a personal assault...<sup>12</sup>

Alger indicated that Germans were inclined to intimidate the weak. He strengthened his stereotype of the Germans by including in the episode a direct threat by Schmidt. When Higgins employed diplomacy in the dispute, Schmidt continued his boisterous ways; "'I can not allow you to talk to me in this way,' said Hugo in a dignified tone. [Schmidt replied;] 'Well, I won't. Maybe you prefer to have me step on your neck tie, hey?'"<sup>13</sup> Alger confirmed his opinion of the aggressive German; he also established his bias against the German dialect. As he resolved the scene, Schmidt again charged Higgins with "*Schwindling*" and left the incident stating, "I may be one Dutchman, but I ain't so dumb as you think I am."<sup>14</sup> Schmidt reiterated this saying "I may me a Dutchman... but I ain't no chump."<sup>15</sup> Alger further confirmed his bias by interjecting through the words of Hugo Higgins that Schmidt was indeed a "Stupid Dutchman."<sup>16</sup>

With this scene the reader gained insight into Alger's visual and cultural perception of German Americans. Alger typified the German stature with his physical description of Schmidt. Alger also, by phonetically spelling Schmidt's accentuated words, indicated a trend of "improperly spoken" English. These particulars were not the sole instances of malicious typing by Alger. The entire episode represented Alger's view of Germans and strengthened his stereotypes of them. His direct connection of physical description and

nationality facilitated the spread of that stereotype to his readers. Alger also supported the notion that Germans were aggressive by nature. Furthermore it was his opinion that Germans were not beyond using their physical attributes against those who had no similar endowment, much like the miss-matched opponents, Schmidt and Higgins.

While the stereotypes visible in the case of Otto Schmidt were the most value laden which Alger presented, all prejudicial representations which the author made were important. These judgments were most significant as the characters were not major players in their respective stories. Alger did not fully develop these characters and failed to give them individual identities. Moreover, identifiable by their Germanic names rather than for their impact on the plot, they were memorable for their few qualities rather than for unique deeds. Readers were more apt to associate the Germanic names with the general characteristics of the Alger players. In short, readers associated the names of Schickling, Brandes, Schick, and Schmidt with physical attributes, stubbornness, thrift, aggression, extortion, and meddling, not with heroic deeds or moral justice. Alger created composite characters with his depictions of German-Americans. Although each character had unique qualities or combinations of qualities, they all had interchangeable traits. Schmidt was boisterous but insistent like Schickling and Brandes. The two German boys were also conscious of financial matters as was Muller.

That interconnection created the composite of the German character, attaching all of Alger's observations to the German heritage.

Alger created his interconnection of Germany by referring to the political movements which represented the entire territory. The French, like the Germans, represented a collective identity in Alger's stories. But in Alger's mind, it was the French property he considered the heritage of all France people. While the presence of the French was not something new in Alger's life, his experience showed that in his writing indicated a nostalgia for them. This air was not nostalgic but hinted at superiority on the part of Alger and his heritage. As with Germany, Alger accepted the French property in Algeria but he was a greater degree. His characterization of Alger's interconnection suggests that the role of a literary writer is to create a world, it led to the possibility of. He also recognized that the French were capable of establishing wealth and luxury as in the case of another man named Mordecai in *The Best Stock*. In this instance Alger's case he recognized the Frenchman's role in that the standard Frenchman was not villainous. However, Alger regularly asked the Frenchman for financial assistance and orientate relationships and as he did not have a sense of honor he made issue of the French estate.



Affected Manners and Feminine Deportment; The French

Alger created his stereotypes of Germans by offering a few poignant examples which represented the entire heritage. The French, like the Germans, appeared relatively infrequently in Alger's stories. But as Alger used only a few characters to identify German characteristics, he used more French players to represent qualities of all French people. While the presence of the French was not something new in Alger's time, his attitude toward them in his writing indicated a contempt for them. This air was not malicious but hinted of superiority on the part of Alger and his heritage. As with Germans, Alger accepted the French presence in America but to a greater degree. His characterizations sometimes represented success as in the case of a theater troupe leader named Mordaunt, in *Jed the Poorhouse Boy*. He also demonstrated that the French were capable of establishing wealth and legacy as in the case of another man named Mordaunt in *Tom the Boot Black*. In this instance Alger's hero befriended the Frenchman indicating that the standard Frenchman was not villainous. However, Alger regularly mocked the Frenchman for foppish attributes and effeminate mannerisms; and as he did with the speech of Germans he made issue of the French accent.

Alger showed these attributes in a number of characters in a variety of settings. Most of Alger's French, like his Germans, appeared in incidental roles. He, however, sustained several of these characters through the course of his stories. One was a man named Duval, a book-maker who appeared in *Paul Prescott's Charge* (1865).<sup>1</sup> Alger was unflattering in his description of Duval as "An unscrupulous sharper."<sup>2</sup> He was a man who "was disposed to push his advantage to the utmost."<sup>3</sup> The reader associated the French name with the immorality of this character, strengthening the stereotype of the untrustworthy Frenchman. Duval was the canvas of a prejudicial Alger portrait. The author named all of Duval's flaws and connected them to his heritage in a passage that exemplified his feelings for this ethnic group:

His face exhibited unmistakable marks of dissipation. Nor did the huge breast-pin and other cheap finery which he wore conceal the fact of his intense vulgarity. His eyes were black and twinkling, his complexion very dark, and his air that of a foreigner. He was in fact, a Frenchman though his language would hardly have betrayed him, unless as sometimes he chose to interlude his discourse with French phrases.<sup>4</sup>

Alger marked the Frenchman with physical identities as he also did to his German characters. He expressed that differences in appearance between Anglo and French were enough to judge character. Duval's dark complexion and black and twinkling eyes marked him as inferior. Moreover Alger associated these physical attributes with the

undesirable character of the book-maker. Although the individual could not control physical traits, Alger nonetheless attacked such characteristics when judging his characters.

Alger imputed Duval with his most common stereotype of the French. Duval dressed in "cheap finery," as did most of Alger's Frenchmen. Alger also marked Duval with peculiar speech, indicating that speech was a direct indication of ethnicity and character. He noted that the Frenchman tried to assimilate with "American" culture by masking his French dialect and expressed the importance of language in ethnic identity. The French attempted to become Anglicized by masking their speech but could not. The impulse to exude his ethnic heritage overwhelmed the need to blend with Anglo-American culture. Alger dictated that assimilation was not an absolute prospect and that cultural differences between Anglo and French were insurmountable.

The Frenchman also appeared in *Struggling Upward; or Luke Larkin's Luck* (1886). This character had similar traits to Duval save for criminal associations. Alger described this man, Mortimer Plantegenet Sprague, as "... A slender waisted, soft voiced young man, dressed in the latest style, who spoke with a slight lisp." This "New York Dude" had "...Affected manners and [a] somewhat feminine deportment."<sup>5</sup> Here the Frenchman, at least partially French as indicated by his name, continued the foppish stereotype which Alger presented through Duval. Sprague also took on a

different stereotype than Duval; femininity. With Duval and Sprague gifted with different attributes, seedy masculinity versus feminine mannerisms, Alger suggested that the French were diverse among themselves, but retained a common trait in flamboyant senses of fashion and gilded appearances.

Alger also attributed this flamboyance to a character in *Adrift in New York; or Tom and Florence Braving the World* (1889).<sup>6</sup> Percy DeBrabazon appeared as "An effeminate looking young man, foppishly..." dressed.<sup>7</sup> He walked about the streets of New York "Swinging a cane, and dressed to the extreme of the fashion."<sup>8</sup> The Anglo characters of the story took notice of this man and his flamboyance. Carrie Leighton, a minor player in the story, commented that DeBrabazon "... Spends a sight for clothes. He always looks as if he had just come out of a band box."<sup>9</sup> Alger strengthened his stereotype of the foppish Frenchman, directly connecting him to Duval and Sprague by that trait. He also voiced his mockery of the French accent which he mentioned in *Struggling Upward*. Alger only noted that Mortimer Plantegenet Sprague had a lisp, but he spoke directly through DeBrabazon of his opinion of their accents. DeBrabazon stated; "I admit that I have a great admiration for the English Character. Its a gweat pity we have no lords in America."<sup>10</sup> DeBrabazon also exaggerated that "I shall go to the Bwooklyn Bwidge, climb to the parapet, jump into the water, and end my misewable life."<sup>11</sup> Although the French accent was not a hindrance to communication, Alger

mocked it, stressing the importance of speaking clear English.

This mockery of the French extended beyond dialect as Alger also expressed his opinion of French names. Carrie Leighton, a representative of Anglo-American propriety, commented that DeBrabazon "...is a funny name, isn't it? You see, his father was a Frenchman."<sup>12</sup> These comments marked French names as awkward and unacceptable. He informed his readers that one's name was an indicator of culture and character. Alger now associated the French name with all the actions and characteristics of Percy DeBrabazon. Readers expected to find the same qualities as DeBrabazon's in people with "funny" French sounding names. The case of DeBrabazon complimented that of Duval. Both episodes expressed the desire of the French to assimilate into American culture, but Alger clarified that this was not possible. While the foppish DeBrabazon shared many of the traits of other Alger Frenchmen, he, like Duval, had a trait all his own, one that negatively marked the French character. DeBrabazon desired to marry Florence, the heroine of the story, and, while he admitted no real affection for her, only for her social status, he pursued the hand of Florence without caution. She replied to her suiter that she refused his proposition and indicated her lack of affection for him. DeBrabazon returned, "I don't mind that... If you will agree to take a feller; you'll learn in time to like him a little..."<sup>13</sup> DeBrabazon's

shallowness dominated this passage. Although he was the sole French character displaying this characteristic it was still slanderous toward the French. DeBrabazon's strong French identity amplified all of his attributes and manners and readers associated that "flaw" with French-Americans.

To this point, Alger attributed shallowness only to DeBrabazon. It was a characteristic that was unique to one of Alger's French, but one that added to the stereotypes of them as it was associated with DeBrabazon's name and heritage. Alger gave another man a unique quality, one that showed that he, as a Frenchman, was an exception to the standard of his fellows of the same heritage. This man of society had the foppish traits of DeBrabazon, Sprague, and Duval; however, unlike these men he played a major role and Alger portrayed him as worthy of the companionship of the hero. Mordaunt first appeared in *Tom the Boot Black* in a most unusual manner. Newly arrived in Cincinnati, the hero, Tom, boarded a ferry boat to cross the Ohio River to Kentucky:

Tom sat down beside a young man well dressed, but a little strange in manners. It was evident that he had been drinking too much, and was at present under the influence of liquor. He was perfectly quiet, however, till they were in the middle of the stream, when all at once he climbed the railing and threw himself into the turbulent water of the river...<sup>14</sup>

Mordaunt initially was an unstable character. His affinity for liquor was evident as was his apathy toward

human life, even his own. Alger also indicated the common trait shared by his Frenchmen, his stylish dress. These traits paled in comparison to the unique qualities which surfaced through the course of the story. Alger enhanced the foppish and social air present in most of his Frenchmen with a lack of ambition. Mordaunt, admittedly a socialite, did not seek advancement, he merely rested on his inheritance. Mordaunt spoke, "The fact is, I am of sociable disposition... [my inheritance] took my ambition and energy."<sup>15</sup>

This attitude was not only a compliment to the characteristics displayed by Alger's Frenchmen, it was also indicative of Alger's aversion toward them. The author expressed his contempt for the French character by placing the young Anglo hero in a position to mold Mordaunt into a more desirable figure. Mordaunt invited his new acquaintance to live with him and said "It would be good to have someone to help me keep straight ...". When the conversation turned to Mordaunt's drinking habits he replied "...I'm a fool, that's all the reason I can give. I'm too weak to resist temptation."<sup>16</sup> This discredited the experience and learning of the Frenchman as he relied on the guidance of a younger, less educated person. Moreover, it indicated a characteristic weakness of the French in terms of temptation and bad habits. Alger amplified the weakness by indicating that the presence of his Anglo hero could cure

the vices of the Frenchman. This was the case when Alger placed Mordaunt in an awkward position with his new mentor:

While walking a flashily-dressed young man, recognizing Mordaunt, stepped up and slapped him on the shoulder, "Come play a game of billiards, Mordaunt," he said. "I can't, Dacres - I've got an engagement with my friend here."

"Sorry for it. Won't he come too?"

"No, he's young. I don't care to take him among such wild fellows as you."

"The last time I played billiards with Dacres he won a hundred dollars off me," said Mordaunt.<sup>17</sup>

Alger made clear implications about the French. They were acceptable company, but only through abandonment of characteristically French habits. Alger allowed his hero to keep company with the Frenchman only because Tom's moral character overpowered Mordaunt's. Alger, as he did in the case of the French accent, indicated that the French could abandon their characteristics in favor of the morality portrayed by his heroes. That abandonment was possible, but only with the help of Anglo-Americans. He also indicated that Anglo culture and traits were more important than their French counterparts. Mordaunt, an educated socialite, succumbed to the influence of a young, uneducated street boy.

In Mordaunt and his fellow Frenchmen Alger presented stronger stereotypes than he did in his Germans. In the case of the latter the stereotypes came to prominence through quick appearances that burned images into the minds of readers. The case of the former is much different. Like



the Germans the French characters were identified by "funny" names. Their actions and characteristics also were associated with their heritage as identified by those names. These uniform characteristics lead to strong stereotypes. Alger cast his Frenchmen as gilded fashion plates, or to use his words "dudes." This was consistent in each of his French characters; one might even say that Alger had only one French character appearing in different stories with different names and nuances. For the reader this translated into the uniformity of the French. Alger offered a standard for his readers to adopt, and possibly to disseminate themselves. For the reader, the Frenchman, both literary and real, was a flashily dressed, shallow socialite, fond of the vices which Alger deplored, such as gambling and drinking. But for Alger, and his reader, these were only temporary flaws. He informed those readers that the French were capable of abandoning their depravities, but only by the influences of Anglo-Americans.

Alger was worthy of the  
 of his times. He was a  
 African-Americans were subjected to his heroes and  
 characters and would always remain in that position  
 short, although he was opposed to the practice of  
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Alger demonstrated his acceptance of  
 in many passages. Of importance was the  
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 the Burton.

"In a Bad Case"; The African-Americans

Alger included the French and Germans relatively infrequently. African-Americans also appeared scarcely in Alger's stories but, when he did write about this ethnic group, his attention was significant. His African-American characters were highly visible, and carried many prejudicial traits. Even though only a few African-American characters appeared in Alger stories, the author gave more actual consideration to them than he did to the French and German characters.

While scholars have concluded that Alger had an aversion to the institution of slavery and an acceptance of the former slaves in his America, his stories offered another insight into his acceptance of these people. His writing indicated that African-Americans were worthy of the company of his heroes, but with many conditions. The African-Americans were subservient to his heroes and other characters and would always remain in that position. In short, although he was opposed to the practice of plantation slavery, he accepted and disseminated a belief in the "social slavery" of former slaves.

Alger demonstrated his acceptance of African-Americans in many passages. Of importance was his inclusion of a popular stereotype of African-Americans in *Bob Burton*.

Clip, the companion of the hero, drew a response from Sally Wolverton, an adversary of Burton's:

If he comes round here, I'll give him a lesson. I can't abide a nigger anyway. They're as lazy as sin, and they ain't got no more sense than a monkey. In my opinion they are a kind of monkey, anyway.<sup>1</sup>

Alger did not accept the African-Americans as this opinion stated and quickly denounced such logic as not his own by stating, "Fortunately for the colored race all are not so prejudiced against them as Sally Wolverton - otherwise they would be in a bad case."<sup>2</sup> Alger did a service to his readers by indicating that prejudice such as Sally Wolverton's was ignorant. But in additional passages the author indicated that his opinion was less than model and relegated the "Colored race" to a "Bad case" of his own design.

As he did to other ethnic groups Alger made note of physical characteristics of African-Americans. Alger emphasized the whiteness of Clip's teeth drawing a stereotypical caricature of the young boy.<sup>3</sup> This unflattering physical image accompanied the more constant jabs of Alger toward African-Americans' intellectual characteristics. Alger charged Clip with unbelievable ignorance and simplicity. Ironically the author displayed that same ignorance in drawing his opinion of African-Americans. The examples of this stereotype were abundant, but several exemplified the case that Alger was not as benevolent toward this group of Americans as he believed

himself to be. The trend of slander toward Clip and others of his kind began in an early episode. Bob tried to teach Clip to read but was unsuccessful. His frustration led to him calling Clip an "Ignoramus." Clip's reply indicated his lack of understanding of the term and resulted in a verbal exchange:

"It means a know nothing, Clip"  
 "I guess you're right, massa Bob, Dat's what I am."  
 "...I guess I never was cut out to be a scholar."  
 "Clip, I don't believe you have any sense."  
 "Spec's I haven't, massa Bob," answered Clip philosophically. "How many have you got?"  
 Bob Laughed.<sup>4</sup>

Alger defined his opinion of African-Americans' predisposed ignorance. This passage not only marked the author's opinion but stereotyped African-Americans as accepting a station of subservience and simplicity. Alger repeated these attitudes throughout *Bob Burton* and left the reader with an understanding that African-Americans were of a lesser fiber than Anglo-Americans. In one episode Bob commented that "I am afraid I shall have to learn for both of us, Clip." Clip's reply indicated he accepted his place; "Dat's so... Dat'll do just well."<sup>5</sup> In other scenes Alger indicated through direct narration that he viewed African-Americans as intellectually inferior to his hero(s). Clip, upon hearing of Mrs. Burton's loss of a receipt absolving her debt, inquired "What's a receipt, missis?" Her reply was condescending and indicative of Alger's views, "'It's a

piece of paper with writing on it, Clip' said the widow adjusting her explanations to Clip's intelligence."<sup>6</sup>

Alger left no doubt of his opinion of the intellectual ability of African-Americans. To him they were unable to understand things as his hero did and they did not have the ambition to even attempt this. He also indicated the result of such "incompetence" in the course of his story. In *Bob Burton* he noted that the African-American was "Utterly incompetent to take the place of his master."<sup>7</sup> The ignorance of African-Americans hindered them from operating independently from their benefactors. Even in their physical freedom they were intellectually, and subsequently practically, bound to the assistance of the empowered. Alger clarified his position with an episode that saw Bob leaving Clip alone for some time; "'Can't think of what's 'come of Massa Bob.' he said to himself, 'he said he'd be back in fifteen minutes. If anything's happened to him, what'll 'come of Clip.'"<sup>8</sup>

The "ignorance" and complacency of African-Americans according to Alger was burdensome to his hero and Anglo-Americans in general. The author portrayed Clip as easily fooled and dull-witted. On one occasion Clip allowed a fugitive to hide aboard the boat which he and Bob were transporting.<sup>9</sup> Clip was neither inquisitive nor cautious in this matter. He trusted a stranger, something an Alger hero may have done, but not without caution. Alger compounded Clip's gullibility in a later scene where Clip naively

believed the spiel of two men who kidnapped Bob. The men persuaded Clip to leave the boat unattended and subject to theft.<sup>10</sup> This disallowed African-Americans from being in the same classification as Alger's heroes. While the hero may have succumbed to deceit once, the African-American was susceptible to repeated duping. Clip did not, and could not have, learned from his mistakes.

Alger complemented his portrait of African-American inferiority with suggestions of their simplicity. He demonstrated through dialogue that African-Americans were doltish and easily amused. His comments also increased the negativity with which he viewed these characters. He presented this in an episode that involved Clip and Aaron Wolverton:

"Yah, yah!" laughed Clip, gleefully; not that there was anything to laugh at, but because it took very little to excite Clip's risibilities...

"What is that black ape grinning about?" [Wolverton] demanded.

Clip ought to have felt insulted, but he was only amused.<sup>11</sup>

Alger could not have stated his opinion on this matter more directly. African-Americans were intellectually inferior to Anglo-Americans, even to the point of misinterpreting the simplest of humor. To further stress his point, Alger included a racial slur against Clip whom he portrayed as incapable of recognizing such insults. This not only indicated that he felt African-Americans were inferior, but that they accepted their social station.

In the case of Clip, Alger also reasoned that African-Americans were characteristically lazy. This lack of ambition, already seen in terms of intellectual advancement, was present in Alger's description of Clip's physical enterprise during the transportation of the Burtons' crop:

... Clip, who was naturally lazy, found it very irksome to stand at the helm and much preferred going here and there on the boat and surveying the scenery on either bank. He hoped that his incompetence would save him from the task.<sup>12</sup>

Alger convicted African-Americans with indolence; in doing so he also charged them with knowingly taking advantage of their own "inferiority" to facilitate their preference for idleness. This self-realization of laziness came to light earlier in the story when Bob remarked to a friend "Why you work harder than Clip, here, though that isn't saying much.." Clip responded and accepted the charges saying, "Spec's I was born lazy."<sup>13</sup> Alger confirmed his opinion that African-Americans were knowledgeable of their work habits, that they were capable of laboring but chose not to, but he also indicated that white Americans did not expect them to be ambitious. When Clip and Bob were burdened by the presence of Aaron Wolverton, "Clip took a broom and began to sweep energetically. Bob could not explain this sudden fit of industry till he saw Clip slyly slip the broom between Wolverton's legs..."<sup>14</sup> Alger noted that both Clip's sweeping and ingenuity in tripping Wolverton were uncharacteristic of African-Americans. Such ambition was



surprising, so much that it overshadowed the cunning of Clip's intent. Alger clouded the deeds of his African-Americans with commentary that detracted from their admirable qualities.

The character of Clip was Alger's most detailed treatment of the African-American in post-bellum America. He summed up this character in his final pages of the story with an unflattering commentary:

Clip is still a member of the family and, though he can not be called a model of industry, he is a favorite through his good nature and love of fun. He is thoroughly loyal to the Burtons and hates Wolverton as much as it is in his nature to hate anybody.<sup>15</sup>

Alger's monologue was more befitting the family dog than a human being. His treatment of Clip showed no respect for him and reiterated the stereotypes found throughout the story.

Alger also interjected the patterns of speech, laziness, and intellectual inferiority, which he gave to Clip, into African-American characters in other stories. This was the case with a character named Pompey of *Tom the Boot Black*. "Pompey had originally been a slave, as he showed by his language at times."<sup>16</sup> Alger provided examples that informed his readers of the specific peculiarities he noticed in the speech of African-Americans. He included passages such as "'Scuse me, massa, but there's a young gemman below that axes to see you."<sup>17</sup>



Alger also cast Pompey as the exception to the "standard" African-American. He referred to him as having "The freedom of a favorite servant," and possessing an "Inquiring mind."<sup>18</sup> This said that African-American servants, other than Pompey, were restricted in their privilege and ambition. As with the case of Clip, Alger demonstrated his understanding that ambition and curiosity were not common to African-Americans and that those qualities were necessary for the individual to receive just treatment from employers.

The case of Pompey did not include all the stereotypes present in that of Clip; another portrayal contained some that were lacking here. In *Adrift in New York* a man named Julius took on the characterization of the ignorantly loyal servant. Dehumanized by Alger's referring to him as "the Negro" he helped the villain imprison the hero while "...actin' according to orders."<sup>19</sup> Alger placed Julius in a position of subservience to his "massa," much like he did to Clip. Julius also was an example of Alger's dull-witted African-American. When his employer learned of Julius's efforts to prevent the escape of their prisoner he remarked, "Good, Julius! I didn't give you credit for such a fertile imagination."<sup>20</sup> Alger cast Julius as the exception to his opinion of African-Americans. As Clip was, on a singular occasion, the exception to the rule of "laziness," so was Julius the exception to the rule of "ingenuity."

Although Alger may have accepted the emancipation of African-Americans he did not accept them as equals in his society. His portrayals of them indicated that they were unequal to the Anglo-Americans they accompanied. To his readers, the African-American characters were acceptable, but burdened by inadequacies. They would never advance because of natural flaws. To Alger, African-Americans remained enslaved by the natural and social conditions that were to the advantage of his hero. His readers found African-Americans inherently inferior to themselves because of the stereotypes which Alger attached to his characters. To these readers, African-Americans were ignorant, lazy, unambitious, complacent, and subservient.

But as he did to other people, Alger placed limitations on their success, finding faults to be cataloged in their characters.

The Scottish character, Sam Slick, is Alger's hero. They failed him the passing of time to the victor. One of Alger's heroes was Dr. Duncan who appeared in "The Doctor's Office" (1877-1890). Duncan was a "pleasant faced Scot" who managed the business of the bank. Frank, lived. A friend to the hero, Alger defended him as a successful man. Alger portrayed him as trustworthy, good-hearted, and displays some of the qualities of the Alger hero. The hero, however, attributed Duncan with a certain amount of vigilance that he put to use. Alger had a certain amount of vigilance and his

"Many a Little Makes a Mickle"; The Scots

Although they were of like cultural backgrounds, and came from the same island as the English, Alger treated his Scottish characters with similar prejudice to that which he inflicted on other ethnic groups. Alger placed them in more novels than African-Americans and often gave them as much personal attention. He cast them in standard roles, mainly that of the thrifty businessman, as Nackenoff noted, or the anxious pugilist. He did not deny their social and economic mobility and sometimes characterized them as successful. But as he did to other people, Alger placed limitations on their success, finding Scots to be careless in their ascendance.

The Scottish characters had many roles in Alger stories. They ranged from the passing stranger to the villain. One of neither extreme was Mr. Duncan who appeared in *Silace Snobden's Office Boy* (1889 - 1890). Duncan was a "pleasant faced Scotchman" who managed the building in which the hero, Frank, lived.<sup>1</sup> A friend to the hero, Duncan defended him on occasion. Alger portrayed him as trustworthy, good hearted, and displaying many of the qualities of the Alger hero. The author, however, attributed Duncan with an overwhelming trait of pugilism that he put to use. Alger had Duncan boast of his and his

fellow Scots' physical prowess when Frank informed him of his imposing stepfather, Luke Gerrish:

We Scotchmen are fond of athletic sports. You ought to see me throw the hammer. I shall be ready to meet your respected stepfather if he likes to come round. Tell him so with my compliments.<sup>2</sup>

Duncan offered this without solicitation. Upon hearing of Frank's unhappiness with his ex-con stepfather he jumped to boast of his abilities and his willingness to apply them. Alger put this trait into action later in the story when Gerrish demanded a refund of rent money from Duncan. Alger stressed the difference in stature between the two, Duncan being the smaller. When Gerrish threatened Duncan, the Scot replied, "I have only a word or two to say to you Mr. Gerrish, leave this office as soon as possible." When Gerrish refused Duncan responded saying, "Then I shall put you out!" The exchange continued with Gerrish returning, "I'd like to see you do it." Duncan answered, "I shall be happy to accommodate you." With that Duncan violently removed Gerrish from his office.<sup>3</sup>

To the reader the Scot was prone to using violence as a means of resolution. Duncan was not only boastful of physical ability but also was fond of applying it. This violent portrayal was unflattering to Scots and overshadowed Duncan's success as a benevolent landlord. In a sense, Alger attributed Duncan's prosperity to his use of violence in retaining his funds. He did not garner that sum by intellectual means, but with physical force.

Aside from the negativity of the violence which Alger attached to him, the character of Duncan indicated that Scots could achieve some degree of success. Alger included other Scottish characters in his stories that demonstrated this. As with Duncan, their success often came about for questionable reasons. One Scottish character appeared as a prosperous businessman but without indication of his business practices. Alger wrote of "A careful Scotch merchant" in *The Young Salesman*, but made no judgmental statements concerning his business ethics.<sup>4</sup> This portrayal was completely neutral and inconsequential. Alger's mention of this man even indicated his admiration for some Scots.

Alger also presented several flourishing Scottish men whose achievements were marked with immoral activity. The first of these was a man named Henderson who appeared as a pawn-broker in *Phil the Fiddler; or, The Story of a Young Street Musician* (1872).<sup>5</sup> Alger cast Henderson as the owner of a thriving pawn shop in New York City who achieved his prosperity through uncouth practices. He loaned minimal amounts on pawned items and asked for exorbitant sums for those that went unclaimed.<sup>6</sup> Although a successful entrepreneur he achieved such a state at the expense of his customers.

Another affluent Scot in Alger's literary world appeared in *Struggling Upward; or, Luke Larkin's Luck*. In this story Alger exemplified his stereotypes of the Scottish with a number of unflattering portrayals, Among them was his

character named Squire Duncan. Squire Duncan was a mysterious and deceitful man, financially profitable and socially prominent. The people of his rural town had various opinions of his character, but generally considered him esoteric:

"He says very little about his past life."

"Perhaps he has his reasons."

"Is he thought to be rich?"

"Yes, but how rich no one knows. He is taxed for his house and grounds, but he may have a good deal of property besides. It is generally thought he has."

This conversation indicated much about the character of Squire Duncan. Alger's failure to praise Duncan for his success, and his shroud of mystery around him indicated that his means of success were less than laudable.

Alger's implications in this passage came to "reality" through the course of the story. The events centered around a stolen bank-box that contained a substantial amount of currency. Duncan, a trustee of the bank, accused Luke Larkin, the hero, of the crime. The events, however, unfolded to reveal Duncan as the perpetrator.<sup>7</sup> This strengthened the claim that Duncan came to financial solvency through unethical means. While Alger was ambiguous and only hinted that Duncan's means of success were unscrupulous in the previous passage, he confirmed that suspicion here. Alger made clear that Duncan, his most successful Scotsman, was only so in terms of financial accumulation.

Duncan's immoral and exploitative nature surfaced in other episodes not related to financial success. He also attained his social and political status by questionable means. Duncan, acting as a member of the school committee, answered his son Randolph's request to remove Luke Larkin from his position as school Janitor. Randolph solicited this out of dislike for the hero; his father complied for much different reasons. Duncan replaced Luke with an Irish boy, Tim Flanagan, to gain favor with the Irish citizens of his burgh:

He felt disposed, for reasons of his own, to appoint Tim Flanagan. He was hoping to be nominated for representative at the next election, and thought the appointment might influence the Irish vote in his favor."<sup>8</sup>

Having ulterior motives for his actions, Duncan was an opportunist who exercised his influence indiscriminately.

Although Alger constructed Duncan as the most detailed example of his notion of the Scottish character, he included others in *Struggling Upward* that indicated his opinion was not limited to an individual Scot. One of these was Randolph, the Squire's son. Like his father, he was a conspirator. Randolph's aversion to Luke Larkin led to a plot to eliminate him from a skating race. The young Scot influenced a friend to collide with Luke, ensuring that the hero would not win the race or the prize.<sup>9</sup> Randolph wielded his influence over his companions for personal gain and to boost his own ego.<sup>10</sup> He also appeared as a conspirator in

the episode of Luke's employment disappointment. He described Luke as "just fit to make fires and sweep the floor," the minimal qualifications for the position. He further advised his father and cohort on the removal, "You'd better do it, Pa."<sup>11</sup>

Alger amplified the abhorrent character of Randolph Duncan by interjecting his opinion of him. He stressed that Randolph maintained an air of supremacy over his peers. His "...assumption of superiority and desire to 'boss' the other boys prevented him from having any real friends."<sup>12</sup> Moreover this Scottish boy was "by no means generous or openhanded."<sup>13</sup> Alger warned the reader that behavior, morals, and assumptions such as those cultivated in Randolph were improper. Yet in lecturing his readers on proper behavior he stereotyped the Scottish through Randolph Duncan.

Consistent with Alger's stereotype of Scots in *Struggling Upward* was Randolph Duncan's treatment of Luke Larkin in light of his father's conspiracy. As his father had no problem in framing Luke Larkin for his own crime, Randolph did not refrain from mocking Luke in the wake of his father's accusations:

"Well, well!" ejaculated Randolph, "I always thought he was a boy of no principal..."

"I suppose Luke will have to go to State's Prison," said Randolph with a gratified smile...

"I haven't any pity for him," said Randolph decidedly...<sup>14</sup>



Aside from the character flaws of Randolph Duncan, his association with another Scottish character contributed to a negative picture of the Scots. That man, Tony Denton, was a billiard saloon owner. Alger highlighted Randolph's most reprehensible actions and his association with Denton:

...Patronizing both the table and the bar, he had fallen in with a few young men of no social standing, who flattered him, and therefore stood in his good graces, with them he played billiards and drank.<sup>15</sup>

This convicted the young Scot as the antithesis of the Alger hero. Frequenting a gambling house disqualified Randolph as capable of Algerian success. He sacrificed his claim, if he had not before that point, as a decent boy in the eyes of Alger.

This episode served another purpose in Alger's depiction of the Scots. Tony Denton, a Scotsman, was responsible for providing the means for corruption. He not only afforded Randolph the opportunity to succumb to temptation, he also supported "young men of no social standing." Denton's occupation was enough to qualify him as an undesirable person, but Alger included character traits in him that worsened his persona. Denton, in addition to being a creditor of Randolph Duncan's, knew of Squire Duncan's involvement in the case of the missing bank box. Denton used his knowledge of the Squire's crime to gain payment of Randolph's debt. He also demanded extra payment for "Not mentioning the circumstances" surrounding the incident. When Squire Duncan agreed to absorb his son's

debt Denton remarked, "So far, so good; but it isn't far enough, I want more."<sup>16</sup>

In addition to showing his extortive nature, Alger connected Denton to other Scots of his stories. He did this by showing that his Scottish characters recognized their heritage and their traits. When Denton collected the debt owed him by the Duncans he remarked on his attention to financial matters, "'Many a little makes a mickle,' as we Scotch say."<sup>17</sup> Denton's recognition of his heritage, and of one of the most common of Alger's stereotypes of Scots, cast all Scots into one mold. Alger made the connection between these two men, but also between all Scots. He suggested that Scots were conscious of their characteristics and that they were proud of them. Although the excerpt was short in length it was the most powerful agent in Alger's stereotyping of Scots. The words designated Scots as clannish and cognizant of their connection by heritage alone. Also, even though Alger only alluded to the most common stereotype of Scots, thrift, this passage effectively attributed all of the traits of every one of his Scottish characters to all the others. Alger said to his readers through Denton that all Scots were the same.

This connection of Scots in conspiracies and improper activities helped to spread Alger's opinion of this ethnic group. Readers adopted that opinion and compounded Alger's Scots into a composite Scot. To those readers, the Scot was a shrewd and even miserly businessman who gained success

through immoral means. That immorality was not limited to business practices but also saturated the idle times of Scots. In addition Scots were clannish but ironically disloyal. They knew their common characteristics, but felt no sense of duty to protect each other, particularly when money was involved.

Alger included Italian characters in only a few stories to give them more attention in a single novel than he did the French, English, American, or Germans. In the novel "The Young Soldier" he wrote a story about a young American soldier who was captured by the British and sold into the hands of the British. In his preface to the novel he wrote the story out of concern for the plight of Italian boys sold into the slavery of the padrone system which was prevalent in New York during the 18th century. The boys worked as slaves for long hours and turned their earnings over to the padrone. They came mostly from Calabria in southern Italy where the padrone purchased them from their parents "for a fixed sum, or rate of annual payment."<sup>1</sup> He claimed that his "novel" had a significant impact, resulting in legislation to stop the exploitation of Italian children.<sup>2</sup>

As Alger wrote of the Italian immigrants in his novel "The Young Soldier" he also expressed his sympathy for the Italian immigrants who were being exploited and persecuted by the British. His disapproval of the British was evident in his writing of Italian men who were being sold into slavery.

## Americanized Less Easily; The Italians

Alger's treatment of Italian immigrants in his works was much different than that of the other ethnic groups. Alger included Italian characters in only a few stories but gave them more attention in a single novel than he did to the Scots, African-Americans, French, or Germans. That novel was *Phil the Fiddler; or, The Story of a Young Street Musician* (1872). This was one of only three cases where the Alger hero was not American born. Alger noted in his preface that he wrote the story out of concern for the plight of Italian boys sold into the slavery of the *Padrone* system which was prevalent in New York during Alger's day. The boys worked as street musicians for long hours and turned their earnings over to the *padrone*. They came mostly from Calabria in southern Italy where the *padrone* purchased them from their parents "For a fixed sum, or rate of annual payment."<sup>1</sup> He claimed that his "Reform novel" had a significant impact, resulting in legislation to minimize the exploitation of Italian children.<sup>2</sup>

As Alger wrote of the Italian children out of compassion and concern for their well being, his novel also functioned to disseminate and perpetuate stereotypes of Italians. His disclosure of abuse was commendable, but his casting of Italian men as exploiters and child haters was

reprehensible. All Italian men, from the *padrone* who bought children from Italy to the fathers who accepted money in exchange for their children, appeared in a negative light. Alger also cast these men with violent tendencies to accompany the immoral practice of removing the children from their homes. Alger's bias appeared in the boys which the *padrone* victimized as well. He characterized them as hating Italian men, strengthening the stereotype of the adult males. Complimentary to this was the boys' adoration for their mothers. Although this was an admirable trait, Alger's frequent reference to this created a stereotype of the boys and their maternal devotion.

Alger's case against the *Padrone* system reflected both his and public opinion of the situation and the parties involved. Alger indicated that public opinion was against the system as he was. A character within *Phil the Fiddler* remarked that the practice of exploiting children was awful and queried "Can such a thing be permitted in the nineteenth century?"<sup>3</sup> Alger indicated to the reader that the public opposed the enslavement of children through the *Padrone* system. He only, however, indicated the public's opposition to the institution or the idea of that oppression.

In other passages Alger told of the public's opinion of the boys themselves. He showed the lack of compassion on the part of the public, heightening the awareness of the plight of the Italian children. In one instance an "American" boy took an apple from Phil and chided him that

the fruit was "Too good for the likes of you."<sup>4</sup> On another occasion a shopkeeper displayed a similar sentiment when he admonished Phil to "Get away from my shop, you little vagabond!... If I had my way, you should all be sent out of the country."<sup>5</sup>

In these episodes Alger indicated mixed feelings toward the Italian boys and the practices that brought them to America. Alger, through the passage in which the incidental character spoke in opposition to the *Padrone* system, at first indicated public support for the boys. However the subsequent quotes showed the confusion under which the American people operated. Alger told the reader that Americans opposed the system in addition to the product of the trade, the children. He told his readers of the hypocrisy of public sentiment. People condemned the source of Italian immigrants and had compassion for them for their cruel treatment, but refused to accept them as Americans. In short, Americans did not approve of the human trade and exploitation; they also disapproved of the presence of the oppressed people.

Although Alger included indications of public opinion in *Phil the Fiddler* he did not dwell on it. Instead he focussed attention on his own opinion of the matter. This work had a conspicuous intention as Alger noted in his preface:

My readers will learn, with surprise, probably, of the hard life led by these children, and the inhumane

treatment which they receive from the speculators who buy them from their parents in Italy.<sup>6</sup>

He made known his intentions to inform the public of the treatment of the Italian boys whose parents disregarded their well-being. He damned the practice and referred to it as "White slavery - for it merits no better name." He even condemned the authorities which allowed it to thrive, the American and Italian governments.<sup>7</sup> Alger intended for this work to cause a reaction, if not materially then emotionally. He stated his opinion that the practice of human importation was abhorrent and that the plight of the children was stirring.

Alger demonstrated a break from what he portrayed to be public sentiment as he opposed the institution of the *Padrone* system, but supported the welfare of the children. His words against his own government even indicated that his writing was objective. But, as with the other ethnic people which he treated in his novels, Alger had a conditional acceptance of these Italian boys. Passages within Alger's writing concluded that the presence of the Italians in America was conditional to their assimilation into and adoption of American culture as he described it. These passages also extended that condition to all ethnic people. He wrote:

They become Americanized less easily than children of other nationalities, and both in dress and outward appearance retain their foreign look, while few, even after several years' residence, acquire even a passable knowledge of the English language.<sup>8</sup>

In this passage Alger indicated what he demonstrated in other works; ethnic people were to assimilate to qualify as Americans. Also, he reiterated what he communicated about every ethnic group, their vernacular was a hindrance and they were to speak the American language.

Although Alger dictated his feelings on the assimilation of foreigners in a direct manner, he included passages to emphasize the claim that he accepted foreigners with the condition that they convert to "Americanism." This was by way of his insistence on Phil's abandonment of his Italian name. At the outset of the story Alger told his readers that he would refer to the main character, Filippo, as Phil for the "Benefit of [those] unfamiliar with Italian names."<sup>9</sup> In stripping Filippo of his name he denied the character a trait that would identify him as an individual, especially within Alger's hopeful homogenous society. This contributed greatly to his formula for assimilation, as did statements he made through more of his characters.

This mandate to remove foreign names surfaced throughout the story. One Alger character stated that "Filippo" was too difficult to pronounce. He opted, instead, to call him "Phil" because it was "Easier to speak."<sup>10</sup> This, too, demonstrated Alger's prejudice against Italian culture, but not as much as other episodes. One of these involved a woman who, like the author who created her, decided to call "Filippo" "Phillip." She commented that "I suppose that is the English name."<sup>11</sup> What Alger did here



was to emphasize the importance of Anglo-American culture. He already demonstrated his opposition to Italian sounding names, but here dictated that Anglo names are best to replace the inferior monikers. Subsequently his message was that Anglo-American culture should have replaced the immigrant's culture.

Alger even included an instance that placed the Italians lower than other ethnic groups in his order of approval. In this case Phil encountered an Irish woman whom he befriended. The meeting resulted in a conversation that demonstrated Alger's subjugation of the Italian people:

"And what is your name?..."

"...My name is Filippo."

"It's a quare name."

"American boys call me Phil."

"That's better. It's a Christian name, and the other isn't."<sup>12</sup>

This demonstrated that another prominent ethnic group, the Irish, were superior to the Italians, at least culturally. Ironically, Alger's Irish woman denounced the name Filippo as not Christian when Italy was the seat of the traditional Irish religion, Catholicism.

In addition to these examples Alger presented other stereotypes that placed the Italians in a lower state of civilization than his own culture. Consistent with his treatment of other ethnic Americans, Alger presented a physical stereotype of the Italian character. In one of the few instances in which Alger mentioned an Italian outside of

*Phil the Fiddler*, Alger referred to a man in *Paul Prescott's Charge*:

...Common enough in our cities... An Italian, short and dark featured, with a velvet cap... grinding out music from a hand-organ, while a woman equally dark and black, sorrowful-looking eyes, accompanied her husband on the tambourine.<sup>13</sup>

This stereotype was consistent in *Phil the Fiddler* as Alger described his main character as having similar features. Phil, according to his creator, had a "Brilliant brown complexion."<sup>14</sup> Alger also applied this physical typing to a Calabrian girl, "Lucia, a pretty, brown-faced girl."<sup>15</sup>

The infrequency of Italian characters in the bulk of Alger's work and his standard physical descriptions of them created a definite stereotype. In the case of *Paul Prescott's Charge* the Italian couple appeared only briefly. Incidental to the story in which they appeared, the consideration of the descriptions found in *Phil the Fiddler* concluded that Alger visually, as well as culturally, identified this ethnic group.

Alger's maligning of the Italians went beyond his standard judgment of physical and cultural characteristics, inundating his work with slanders against specific Italians. He judged that Italian men were violent, uncaring, and exploitative of their children, generalizing that this section of Italians was of worse character than the whole of the ethnic group. In *Phil the Fiddler*, Alger made no positive references to any Italian male older than Phil.

He heightened the role of the main Italian man in the story, the *padrone*, as an exploiter of children by including constant references to his violent tendencies. Early in the story the author informed his readers that the *padrone* used violence as a means of control over his charges. When Phil entered a conversation with a man on the subject of his treatment, his acquaintance inquired of the abuse, "Does he beat you hard?" "Si, Signore, with a stick," replied Phil.<sup>16</sup> This, only one of the many instances of Alger's abusive Italian man, described physical means of abuse. In additional episodes Alger revealed that the *padrone* was not compulsive in this behavior, but was motivated by profit and even enjoyed administering punishment. He told his young musicians, "I don't care where you get the money. But if you don't bring home all I expect, you shall feel the stick."<sup>17</sup> Alger stressed this point throughout the story and even interjected his own sentiments to damn the *Padrone's* actions:

Whenever they are detected [concealing money], woe betide them. The *Padrone* makes an example of them, inflicting a cruel punishment, in order to deter other boys from imitating them.<sup>18</sup>

Alger made the greed of the *padrone* evident in these passages. The Italian man used violence to motivate his charges to be more productive. A more startling characteristic which Alger attributed to the *padrone* was his love for abusing the young boys. On the occasion that Phil

returned to the *padrone* with the sum he required Alger noted:

[The *padrone*] was glad to get more than he expected, but a little disappointed that he had no good excuse for beating [Phil]; for he had one of those hard, cruel natures that delights in inflicting pain and anguish upon others.<sup>19</sup>

Alger amplified the horror of the *padrone* with this disclosure of his violent nature in addition to his violent actions. But that augmentation did not end there. Alger wrote that the abuse of the *padrone* resulted in the boys' fear of his temper. On the occasion that Phil secured more money than the *padrone* required he shared his purse with his companions. He justified his generosity saying "...I don't want to carry too much, or the *padrone* will expect me to bring as much every day, and that I can not do."<sup>20</sup> If Phil could not fulfil his unreasonable quota he "would be brutally beaten."<sup>21</sup>

The beatings of the *padrone* not only resulted in the uneasiness, fear, and paranoia among the young musicians, it also had a more horrifying end. Alger, in a stirring scene, related the death of Phil's friend Giacomo directly to the *padrone* and indirectly to his father; "With that smile on his face, [Giacomo] gave one quick gasp and died - a victim of the *padrone's* tyranny and his father's cupidity."<sup>22</sup>

Throughout the work, Alger charged only the *padrone* and the fathers of the Italian boys with responsibility for the abuse of the young street musicians. Alger's attack on the

fathers surfaced early in the story with dialogue between Phil and Giacomo. Telling Phil he had a desire to see his mother and sister, Giacomo bitterly reflected on his father; "I don't want to see him... he sold me to the *padrone*. My mother wept when I went away, but my father only thought of the money."<sup>23</sup> Alger reiterated Giacomo's sentiments on several occasions. On one of these, Giacomo soliloquized, "I should like to go back to my home in Italy, and see my mother again before I die. *She* loved me." Alger added to this emotional scene, "The almost unconscious emphasis which he laid on the word 'she' showed that in his own mind he was comparing her with his father, who had sold him into such cruel slavery."<sup>24</sup>

Alger compounded his damnation of Italian men by including a strong bond between mother and child. This maternal affection became synonymous with paternal animosity. Alger inundated the story with sentiments of this sort. His characters made constant references to their maternal longing. The ill fated Giacomo desperately reflected that "I long so much to go back to Italy. If I could see mother once more, I would be willing to die then."<sup>25</sup> Alger portrayed the Italian boy's affection on one final occasion, on his death bed; "The little boy stirred in his sleep, and murmured, '*Madre*.' He had been dreaming of his mother and his far-off Italian home."<sup>26</sup>

Giacomo was not as old as Phil, and understandably his affection for his mother was strong. But Phil had

sentiments much like Giacomo and even displayed them in less desperate circumstances. He had a decided preference against his father who "...for a few paltry ducats..." sold his son into "cruel slavery."<sup>27</sup> His fondness for his mother also surfaced in conversations such as his discussion of his situation with an acquaintance. He responded to a question about his parents knowledge of the conditions he would bear upon his arrival in America that "My mother did not know."<sup>28</sup>

Alger also included passages in which he both strengthened the child-mother bond and condemned the behavior of the father. While Phil's memories of his father in Italy were negative, his recollections of his mother were sincere and hopeful. On one occasion Alger brought these sentiments to light in a single passage:

[Phil] almost fancied himself in his Calabrian home, with his mother and sisters about - in his home as it was before cupidity entered his father's heart and impressed him to sell his own flesh and blood into slavery in a foreign land.<sup>29</sup>

In this solitary incident Alger indicated that Italian fathers acted so reprehensibly that their own sons would effectually divorce themselves from that parent. The quote also demonstrated that in that divorce, the relationship with the mother remained intact, and almost necessary for the mental survival of the child. The reassurance that one parent was not at fault allowed the child to function, at least in the interest of surviving the brutality of the *Padrone* system. The hope that the child could one day

return to his mother also allowed him to remove himself from the relationship with his father.

Examination of *Phil The Fiddler* revealed much about Alger's attitude toward Italians. His treatment was unbalanced, all characters falling within his mold. He restricted his presentation to the negative aspects of the Italian people. By limiting himself to detailed descriptions of only the boys and the *padrone*, his readers only knew Italians as those characters. Although Alger mentioned that Italian families lived in America and led a better life than the street musicians, his concentration on the less fortunate and the villainous projected them, the *padrone* and the street musicians, as the standard Italian people.

Alger's perception of the Italians then became a basis for readers' perceptions. In short, Italians were an inferior addition to the established Anglo-American society. Their names were not suitable and even barbaric. The oddity of their complexion was also something for Americans to notice, separating the Italians from the established population. Alger also included countless remarks condemning the violent and uncaring nature of the adult Italian males. The *padrone*, the only Italian whose character Alger developed fully, was the only example by which the readers could compare actual Italian male acquaintances. The undeveloped characters, those fathers Alger introduced through commentary and dialogue, also had



no comparison. Alger did not explore the possibility of an Italian father reluctant to release his son to the *padrone*. Instead, he portrayed all these men as willing, even anxious to trade their children for pocket-change. Not one Italian man appeared with any dignity in *Phil the Fiddler*. Italian men were either the *padrone*, whose actions were inexcusable, or the father, who was directly responsible for the son's enslavement.

In summary, although Alger's aim to inform the public of the travesty of the *Padrone* system was noble, his expose was slanderous to the Italian people. His insistence that Italians forsake their names indicated his belief in their inherent inferiority. Likewise, his biased examples of the Italian character facilitated the spread of his belief. The reader believed, as Alger described, that all Italian men, identifiable by distinctly Italian names, exploited children, and that money motivated them to transgress basic human rights.

The story of an Irishman, who out of economy thought he would teach his horse to feed on shavings. So he provided the horse with a pair of green spectacles which made the shavings look eatable. But unfortunately, just as the horse learned, he died.

In this passage Alger said much about his view of the Irish. He accused them of stupidity and poor judgment. This was a portrait of the Irish as he interjected through his Irish characters in every work he produced. Although some of these Irish people



Spulpeens, Ruffians, and Muscular Friends; The Irish

Alger's images of the Italians were among the most poignant ethnic portraits which he produced; but writing of the Irish more often than any other ethnic group he also produced caustic images of them. His treatment of them was consistent with that of other groups, but contained broader stereotypes. Alger saw traits in the other people such as aggression, simplicity, and idleness. He attributed the Irish with these traits and others, such as bullyism as Nackenoff wrote, that set them apart from his idealized Anglo-American hero.

Alger recognized the Irish as a fixture in post-Civil War America. He demonstrated this sharply with an anecdote that slandered the Irish in *Ragged Dick; or Street Life in New York* (1867) He told:

The story of an Irishman, who out of economy thought he would teach his horse to feed on shavings. So he provided the horse with a pair of green spectacles which made the shavings look eatable. But unfortunately, just as the horse learned, he up and died.<sup>1</sup>

In this passage Alger said much about his opinion of the Irish. He accused them of simple-mindedness and poor judgment. This was a precursor of the opinion which he interjected through his Irish characters in nearly every work he produced. Although some of these Irish people

appeared as good natured and beneficial to the hero, Alger placed them in settings that made them exceptions to the stereotypes. His language implied that they were good people despite their Irishness.

An example of this was Mrs. O'Keefe whom Alger placed in *Adrift in New York*. He described her as "A good, respectable woman..." who was "...Good hearted." Dodger, the hero of the story spoke these words in favor of the Irish woman. He preceded these comments, however, by saying that "She ain't a lady at all... She keeps an apple-stand near the corner of Bowery and Grand Street."<sup>2</sup> Alger detracted from her good character by mentioning the unrespectable location in which she resided. Alger later reiterated his suspicion of her good nature by stating that inconsequential habits overrode her intangible qualities. "Mrs. O'Keefe, though a good friend, and a kind hearted woman, was not a model housekeeper."<sup>3</sup> Alger, in making this comment, demonstrated his desire to discount the Irish character by any means. He placed more importance on her domestic capacity than on her value as a friend.

Alger's message about the Irish was twisted. He told the reader that the Irish were complacent with their lifestyles, and that it hindered them from inclusion in his plan of social mobility. He also included strong stereotypes that placed them below his esteemed hero such as in the case of Mrs. O'Keefe. Alger developed his opinion that the Irish were indifferent with their poor housekeeping

and even went so far as to suggest that the Irish were dirty people. Mrs. O'Keefe, According to Alger, was comfortable with her slovenly home. She kept a "back room, about twelve foot square, furnished in the plainest manner, uncarpeted, except for a strip that was laid, like a rug, beside the bedstead." In showing the room to a boarder she remarked that the room was "All nice and comfortable as you would wish to see."<sup>4</sup> She had no desire to be anything less than simple in her accommodations for herself and her guests. Alger suggested that her complacency detracted from her good character, even though he described her as friendly and good-hearted. A similar case was that of Mrs. Mooney of *Ragged Dick*. Alger wrote that she had "One of those comfortable temperaments which was tolerant of dirt, and didn't mind it in the least."<sup>5</sup>

With these examples Alger placed the Irish in an order that would not achieve the success which he designed. They had a contentment that did not allow them to proceed beyond their circumstances. But Alger included another stereotype that hindered their advancement and separated them from the hero. That trait was unsophistication. He cultivated this property in many characters, including Mrs. O'Keefe. He demonstrated this through her own admission; "In fact, I don' mind tellin' you, my dear, that I can't write myself."<sup>6</sup> Alger portrayed another character in *Adrift in New York* as simple and incompetent. An Irish girl and occasional employee of Mrs. O'Keefe, Kitty, was the victim of an

unflattering Alger portrayal. He wrote that she was unable to fulfill her duties of watching Mrs. O'Keefe's apple-cart successfully. Her work often resulted in theft and lost profit for the Irish woman. Nonetheless, Mrs. O'Keefe retained Kitty in her employ, even admitting that "I can't depend on that Kitty."<sup>7</sup> In addition to casting the young Irish girl as an incompetent and simple person, Alger hinted that the Irish were clannish, opting to rely on their own nationals. In this case, Mrs. O'Keefe's employment of an Irish girl, despite her faults, was a prime example of the insularity that Alger saw in the Irish.

Alger also presented a simple and inept Irish girl, Bridget, in *Ragged Dick*. Ragged Dick and his companion were searching for a bank-book they believed to be stolen. The hero and his friend ruled Bridget, a domestic servant in the boarding house, out of suspicion, and as an agent in the search, as "She wouldn't know what a bank-book was."<sup>8</sup> Alger equated her mental capacity with her social position and heritage. Although his intention may not have been to defame the Irish, his use of an Irish girl, with a distinct Irish name, told the readers that the Irish were incapable of understanding simple things, like identifying a bank-book.

The simplistic Irish domestic servant also appeared in *Silas Snobden's Office Boy*. Katy, the servant of a wealthy businessman, admitted a confidence man into the house. "Accessible to flattery," she believed his story of

misfortune and facilitated his kidnapping of the wealthy man's son.<sup>9</sup> Katy displayed the simplicity that Alger attributed to many of his Irish characters. She had a blind trust of a stranger, and failed to employ good judgment. Alger did not fully develop her character, nor did he dedicate much time to the other Irish domestic servants. In *Paul Prescott's Charge*, however, he more completely cultivated the character of Hannah, an Irish servant.

Alger introduced Hannah as slow to respond to the beckoning of her employer. Upon finally arriving in his presence she informed him that her delay was due to her hands being covered with flour. He responded smugly that "Flour is an accidental circumstance." Alger belittled the Irish girl by having her respond to the simple statement, "What's That?"<sup>10</sup> The confrontation between Hannah and her employer continued:

"That could easily be remedied by ablution."

"There ain't any ablution in the house," said the mystified Hannah.

"I mean," Squire Newcomb condescended to explain, "the application of water - in short, washing."<sup>11</sup>

Alger was clear that Hannah was of lesser intelligence than her Anglo-American employer. He concluded that the service of the higher social classes was the station of the Irish character. In this instance Hannah was complacent in her subservience as she did not protest the condescension of her employer.

This portrayal of subservience and ignorance was not the only episode of Hannah's lack of sophistication. In one other scene, several characteristics surfaced to demonstrate Alger's casting of the Irish as simple minded. Of this occasion, Alger wrote:

Hannah had been sitting over the kitchen fire enjoying in social chat with a "cousin" of hers from Ireland, a young man whom she had never seen or heard of three months before...<sup>12</sup>

Hannah, introducing her "cousin" to her employer, said "He's just from Ireland... and it seems like home to see him."<sup>13</sup> Alger placed Hannah in a situation that showed both gullibility and clannishness. His perception that the Irish unconditionally accepted their own led to Hannah's receiving of the young man under false pretenses. Alger commented that "In what way he had succeeded in convincing her of the relationship I have never been able to learn..."<sup>14</sup>

Alger displayed the gullibility and simplicity of Hannah through her acceptance of an Irish stranger. He also did this in another way, through the prank of her employer's son, Ben. Ben dressed himself as a ghost by placing a sheet over his head. His intention was to scare Hannah to allow him to enter the house unnoticed. Upon seeing the "ghost," the Irish girl exclaimed "Howly Virgin, defend me!"<sup>15</sup> Hannah responded by telling her employer of her experience. In doing so she exaggerated, "...I saw a great white ghost, ten foot tall, standing forninst me... and he spread his arms and spoke in a terrible voice and was going to carry me

off wid him..." Her employer's response to this tale was "I hope you have not been drinking."<sup>16</sup>

Alger offered several stereotypes of the Irish in this episode. He resurrected Hannah's gullibility as she accepted the play of Ben Newcomb and exaggerated the experience. Alger also highlighted her religious faith by interjecting hysterical prayers. In addition to these typings, the author included one of the most common stereotypes of the Irish, drinking. Although he did not depict Hannah imbibing, he interjected comments from her employer to suggest the habit.

Two stereotypes that appeared in the episode of Hannah also appeared in another story, *Tom the Boot Black*. In this tale, Alger included alcoholism and religious faith in his Irish characters. One character, Hugh Trimble, was a drunk. Alger introduced him as a backwoodsman whom the villain hired to abduct the hero. Trimble, according to the author, was regularly "Under the influence of liquor."<sup>17</sup> The devout Irish Catholic also appeared in the form of a coachman whose prayers to St. Patrick were the focus of his portrayal.<sup>18</sup>

These characters, however, were not the most common stereotypes which Alger presented. They were important, though, as they remained popular images of the Irish-American. Alger included representations of the Irish, more constant than the Irish domestic or gullible Irish girl. Among these characters were the pugilist, the villain, the



criminal, and the unmotivated. Alger attributed one of these typings, idleness, to many of his Irish boys. In several instances he brought this to the attention of the reader in an effective manner. One of these concerned Tim Flanagan of *Struggling Upward*, the young boy who replaced Luke Larkin as the school janitor. Tim, caught up in the scheme of his mother and Squire Duncan, expressed his dislike of his new position. He felt it was too much work for too little money. Hearing that his pay was one dollar per week he responded "That isn't enough."<sup>19</sup> Also, learning that his duties included little more than sweeping and stoking the furnace he protested "I don't think I'll like it."<sup>20</sup>

Alger also included an Irish boy in *Silas Snobden's Office Boy* that exceeded the indolence of Tim Flanagan. Frank Sheehan first appeared as a street waif who passed the time playing marbles on a New York sidewalk. Alger showed some industriousness in Frank's character by employing him to deliver a letter at the price of a quarter. This ambition was questionable, though, as he demanded his payment "suspiciously."<sup>21</sup> His motivation was not to combat boredom, something Alger projected as Frank enjoying, but for mere financial gain.

Alger added to this stereotype of sloth when Frank found the villain, Luke Gerrish, willing to accept the letter before Frank could reach his destination. Frank obliged his acquaintance because he "did not mind being



saved a long walk." He showed his laziness more when Gerrish told him "You can just go off the block for a couple of hours." Alger commented that "This struck Frank favorably, and he walked quickly on."<sup>22</sup> Alger added to his description of the sluggish Frank Sheehan, stating that on another occasion he "had nothing in particular to do."<sup>23</sup>

The portrayal of the lazy Irish boy was not the most detrimental of Alger's stereotypes. More severe were his episodes depicting the violent Irish. Such characters appeared as the bully in many stories, but also took other forms. Alger included the bully in three of his best known works, *Tom the Boot Black*, *Ragged Dick*, and *Phil the Fiddler*. In the first story, Pat Walsh appeared as a rival to the title character:

He enjoyed a bad reputation among his comrades as one who would take a mean advantage if he dared, and who was at all times ready to bully a smaller boy. He had long cherished an ill feeling toward Tom, because the latter had interfered on one occasion to protect a smaller boy whom Pat tried to cheat out of a job.<sup>24</sup>

Alger's description was enough to convince his readers of the bad character of Pat Walsh. He included several passages, however, that exemplified Walsh's propensity for violence and coercion, but with a hint of cowardice that placed the Irish boy in a more negative light. In one of these scenes Alger noted that "Pat contented himself hitherto with uttering threats [at Tom], which he hesitated to carry into execution." This uncertainty did not dissuade Pat from forcing "a quarrel upon Tom at the first

opportunity."<sup>25</sup> Alger put Pat's intentions into action with threatening language when the two boys clashed over a customer. The Irish boy threatened, "Lave wid yer, or I'll smash yer."<sup>26</sup> Alger gave Pat Walsh a fervor to use physical force to gain his desires but he did not let Walsh succeed by using such tactics. The hero defeated the Irish boy with wits, Alger's preferred method of resolution. Nonetheless he demonstrated the Irish boy's desire to use violence.

Alger included another violent Irish boy in *Ragged Dick*. In this story he noted a more active Irish bully, Mickey Maguire:

Among the down-town boot-blacks was one hailing from the Five-Points, - a stout, red-haired, freckle-faced boy of fourteen, bearing the name of Mickey Maguire. This boy, by his boldness and recklessness, as well as by his personal strength, which was considerable, had acquired an ascendancy among his fellow professionals, and had a gang of subservient followers, whom he led into acts of ruffianism, not unfrequently terminating in a month or two at Blackwell's Island. Mickey himself had served two terms there; but the confinement appeared to have had very little effect in amending his conduct, except, perhaps, in making him a little more cautious about an encounter with the "cops," as the members of the city police are, for some unknown reason, styled among the Five-Point boys.<sup>27</sup>

As with his exposition of Pat Walsh, Alger was exhaustive with his initial description of this Irish boy, but also was not satisfied with this extensive report. He introduced circumstances and interjected his opinion of boys such as Mickey Maguire by telling his readers that Mickey was "Quarrelsome, like all bullies..." Alger also gave Mickey

"inclinations to assault" Ragged Dick which he carried out, resulting in an altercation with the initial victim turning successfully on his assailant.<sup>28</sup>

In the previous examples, Alger created two parallel characters in which the stereotype of the Irish bully was consistent. Also constant was the characterization of the bully as coward. While Alger only hinted of Pat Walsh's timidity, he provided an example of Mickey Maguire's "yellow streak." Following the altercation in which Ragged Dick prevailed over the Irish boy, the vanquished bully sought revenge. Mickey Maguire heaved a stone at Ragged Dick then ran away. The hero pursued the bully when Mickey tripped and fell. "'Ow!' he whined. 'Don't hit a feller when he's down.'"<sup>29</sup>

The examples of Pat Walsh and Mickey Maguire were enough to convict Alger of stereotyping the Irish. Another Irish boy, however, appeared in *Phil the Fiddler* that contributed to this image of violence and harassment. On more than one occasion, Tim Rafferty was a hindrance to Filippo. He harassed the young Italian boy, and insisted on handling Phil's fiddle. When the young musician resisted, Tim responded to his friends that "I can fight him wid one hand..."<sup>30</sup> Alger informed the reader that Tim Rafferty may have done that if it were not for the intervention of Phil's "American" friend. But like Mickey Maguire, Tim Rafferty was not gracious in his defeat and he vowed "...If he ever met Phil again, to 'get even with him,' as he expressed

it..." That was the case as he found such an opportunity and relieved Phil of his instrument and threw it into the street where a street car crushed it.<sup>31</sup>

The young Irish boys were not the only Irish characters to appear with Alger's gift of a violent streak. Alger cast Mrs. McGuire and her husband of *Phil the Fiddler* as having violent tendencies, albeit used to benefit the hero. Mrs. McGuire appeared when Phil fled the *padrone* and his nephew by crossing to New Jersey. The *padrone's* nephew, Pietro, followed closely behind Phil until the hero took refuge in the house of the Irish woman. Phil told her of his plight and that Pietro was close by and was sure to return him to the *padrone*. "'It's I that would like to see him try it,' said Mrs. McGuire, shaking her head in a very positive manner. 'I'd break my broom over his back first.'"<sup>32</sup> Alger cast Mrs. McGuire as having the willingness and eagerness to resolve a problem with physical force. Even though her actions were to help the hero, they were nonetheless similar to the responses of the street ruffians. Just as the waifs put their threats into action, so did Mrs. McGuire's threats come to reality, but through her husband. On the occasion that the *padrone* learned of the Phil's whereabouts he traveled to the McGuire home to retrieve his charge. When he tried to take Phil from his refuge "The Irish man seized the *padrone*, and, lifting him from the floor, carried him to the window, despite his struggles, and thrusting him out, let him drop." Having

done so, his wife "...sat down on a chair and laughed till she cried."<sup>33</sup> Although this episode demonstrated that all Irish were not necessarily bad people, they did have qualities about them that were consistent.

The violence which Alger portrayed in these examples was of a peculiar nature. The bullies used violence out of youthful inexperience, demonstrating ruffianism and delinquency. The case of the McGuires was also exceptional. Although they may have used other means to repel the efforts of the *padrone* the actions were justifiable considering the plight of the hero. Other characters took on inexcusable qualities that cast them in the most negative manner. They were the Irish criminals and villains.

These characters who were more than street urchins took several forms. The mildest of these was the street waif who resorted to thievery. Jimmy Mahone, for example, whom Mrs. O'Keefe encountered in *Adrift in New York*, often stole apples from the cart of the Irish woman who described him as a "young spulpeen."<sup>34</sup> Alger's treatment of such scamps was trivial. He made no concrete condemnations of their behavior, but associated their criminal actions with their names and heritage.

A more serious offender was Hugo Higgins, the swindler who appeared in *Jed the Poorhouse Boy*. Alger described him as one of the "...Sharpers ready to fleece the young and inexperienced."<sup>35</sup> That was indeed his intention. When the irate Otto Schmidt left Higgins's store in a tirade, Higgins

lied to his prospective customers who were present that Schmidt was "One of our successful agents." He persuaded a customer to take more stationary packages than needed, and advised him to sell his product "Some distance from the city."<sup>36</sup> This advice was obviously for Higgins's financial gain as well as to alleviate the chances of legal reprisals by the agents.

Although these two Irish characters were examples of reprehensible and dishonest proceedings, Alger included an Irishman in *Andy Gordon* that was the archetypal criminal. Mike Hogan was a conniving, violent, and dishonest felon. Alger described him as "A low brow ruffian, with unkempt hair and a beard of a week's growth... [who] served in Sing Sing, but punishment in no way altered his way of life."<sup>37</sup> Alger provided examples of Hogan's criminal nature in several episodes. In one, Hogan attacked a young boy's dog, choking it to near death. He only relinquished his grip at the boy's promise of a quarter.<sup>38</sup> Alger also demonstrated the criminal leanings of Hogan in another scene. In this instance, Hogan broke out a window to gain entry into the room where the hero was guarding a cash box containing five hundred dollars. Out-witted by the hero who removed the box to a safer location, Hogan offered Andy Gordon a share of the money in return for his cooperation.<sup>39</sup> Hogan, although not the typical Irishman of Alger's stories, appeared in a precarious position. Alger identified him as both a criminal, and as of Irish heritage.



In this story, the Irish name "Hogan" was figuratively synonymous with criminal activity. Alger also attached a physical description to Hogan, something common to his treatment of all ethnic people. This, however was not a trend which Alger created in his descriptions of Irish men. Instead, in the case of the Irish, Alger focussed his physical descriptions on women.

Alger stereotyped his Irish women as being of large size. He described Mrs. O'Keefe of *Adrift in New York* as "A lady of ample proportions, whose broad Celtic face seemed to indicate alike good sense and a kindly spirit."<sup>40</sup> This may have been innocent enough on its own; but coupled with other examples of Alger's physical descriptions it contributed to the standardization of the Irish woman. In *Silas Snobden's Office Boy*, Alger introduced a woman named Sarah Moriarty, whom he described as weighing nearly two hundred pounds.<sup>41</sup> Another "stout, wholesome looking Irish-woman" appeared in *Tom the Boot Black*. Alger described Mrs. Flanagan as a maternal woman, always ready to cook.<sup>42</sup> Similar to these, was Alger's description of Bridget McGuire of *Phil the Fiddler*. He described her as Phil's "Muscular" friend, who was "no light, delicate woman."<sup>43</sup>

These descriptions were not malicious, but were harmful. Alger's association of physical characteristics with heritage was as inaccurate as associating criminal activity with ancestry. However, this habit of Alger's was not the most important of his representations of the Irish.

His attribution of violence, criminality, and simplicity to his Irish characters was much more prolific. These characteristics appeared more regularly in the Irish characters than did good-will, trust, and honesty.

Of all the ethnic groups which he described in his writing, Alger gave the Irish the most attention. He not only included them more frequently than any other group, but his writing indicated the largest variety of stereotypes. While he showed Germans, French, Scots, African-Americans, and Italians all had specific stereotypes, he attributed the Irish with many of the same negative qualities, as well as those unique to themselves. For the reader, Alger's Irish were the model of non-Anglo stereotypes. They carried the most qualities which Alger preached against, and occupied a position that would easily translate into ill perception by readers. To them the Irish were simple and complacent people with no chance for social advancement. This immobility was due to their natural traits such as laziness, incompetence, and violence.

Alger also built his standard ethnic characters by repetition of traits in a character. Such was the case of African-Americans and Italians. In Bob, Alger provided numerous examples of Clip's simple-mindedness and lack of education. Likewise, in Phil the Sicilian, the author recited the violent nature of the padrone and the "hospitality" of the Italian father. These repetitions of characteristics



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Alger made clear that he had strong opinions of those who were not of established Anglo-American lineage. The ethnic characters added contrast to his heroes, whom he offered as role models for his readers. Alger presented these stereotypes in different ways. In the case of the Germans and Scots, he provided few examples of these people. Alger attached abrasive characteristics to them, such as in the case of Schmidt. Alger attributed Schmidt with identifiable properties, such as dialect and manners, that separated him from heroic ideals. The Scots, likewise, appeared sparsely. Identifiable by their actions and other qualities, the few Scottish characters such as Squire Duncan, his son, and Tony Denton, carried the traits of greed and graft, suggesting that that was the norm for their kind.

Alger also built his standard ethnic characters by repetition of traits in a character. Such was the case of African-Americans and Italians. In *Bob Burton* Alger provided numerous examples of Clip's simple-mindedness and lack of education. Likewise, in *Phil the Fiddler* the author recited the violent nature of the *padrone* and the "cupidity" of the Italian father. These repetitions of characteristics image of the ethnic type.

hammered the ethnic Americans into Alger's preferred shape. This, however, was not the end of Alger's typing.

The author undertook another method of creating stereotypes of ethnic Americans. He did this much as he cast the African-Americans and Italians into their roles by repeating that a character within a certain story had specific qualities. In the case of the Irish and French, however, he repeated their respective characteristics over various stories rather than in a single work. In essence Alger interjected the same Irish and French characters into multiple stories, merely changing the names of stock characters. Percy DeBrabazon, the foppish New York socialite, traveled on a Western stage with the name of Mortimer Plantegenet Sprague. Mickey Maguire and Pat Walsh were essentially the same Irish bully, appearing in two different volumes. This form of stereotyping reached across stories to indicate to readers that members of a certain ethnic group had certain identifiable and consistent qualities. ethnic people. He told his readers that Alger's identification of ethnic people also took on a form as specific as his patterns ethnic generalizations. In some instances he identified the ethnic characters by naming their heritage. He pointed out the Irish house servant, or the German boy, or the Scottish gambler, or the French fop. Associating a nationality with the accompanying name and attached characteristics offered the reader a comprehensive image of the ethnic type.

Alger, however, did not always directly identify his ethnic characters. But this did not suppress the association of stereotypes with ethnic names. Carol Nackenoff pointed out that "Alger's heroes almost inevitably have impeccable white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant backgrounds, as evidenced by their unmistakable names."<sup>1</sup> This association of character and name also applied to the ethnic people. Just as the Anglo name suggested the qualities Alger attributed to the hero, the ethnic name represented the qualities of its corresponding origin. Alger told his readers that, for example, Irish names were synonymous with lack of ambition, bullying, and gullibility, while French sounding names indicated sociability and cheap refinement.

If the reader could not identify ethnic Americans by the names of its members, Alger provided additional characteristics that aided recognition. Alger trusted the pseudoscience of physiognomy in evaluating people.<sup>2</sup> This belief led to his inclusion of physical descriptions when identifying ethnic people. He told his readers that physical appearance was as important for identifying an individual as were intangible qualities. Just as the reader could associate an ethnic name with the qualities that Alger ascribed to the corresponding character, the physical descriptions were an indication of heritage and characteristics. For example, the dark, olive skin of Phil the fiddler was an indication of his Italian heritage. This, corroborated with the similar description of an

Italian organ grinder, told the reader that Italians were all dark-skinned.

The methods by which Alger stereotyped, and the actual stereotypes, were important for a number of reasons. Obviously, he sent a message to his readers concerning the different ethnic groups which he encountered. Also of importance were the readers whom Alger reached with his portraits of the ethnic Americans. Circumstances at the time of Alger's writing helped to spread his works to untapped and vulnerable audiences. Also, his publication over decades was responsible for reaching audiences who could never have experienced the conditions about which he wrote.

Alger wrote for a young, gullible audience who easily received his opinion of ethnic Americans. He knew that writing for boys in the "Formative period of youth," would have great influence over them.<sup>3</sup> Youth were, and are, susceptible to the novel as a source of fact. Fiction entices children to believe what is written. Alger, and other reality based novelists, offered children a "Patina of entertaining plot and prose."<sup>4</sup> This was indeed the case with Alger's stories. He presented his young readers with entertainment inundated with his ethnic agenda. He made his stories believable by interweaving "real personages, and real locations" into his "Fictional journeys." He constantly reminded his readers of this, strengthening his

cross section of American society. During Alger's day, and

claim of realism and heightening the concern of critics who were opposed to his influence over his readers.<sup>5</sup>

Alger also targeted an audience that was gullible because of its social standing. The boys he wrote for were from the working class, which was just beginning to read fiction.<sup>6</sup> Being new to this type of writing, the working class could not readily discern between fact and fiction. In essence, they believed what they read because of their inexperience with the written word, and of what those words represented. The influence that he had over them was evident in the number of "moral crusaders" that attempted to prevent the distribution of his texts to the rising working class. Had he had no influence on his readers' thoughts and actions, no opposition would have surfaced.<sup>7</sup> However, the book trade ensured that Alger would reach the new marketplace of the working class, not only in the city, but across the country. His books were inexpensive; according to a recent analyst, Olivia Smith, this was "evidence of the author's malicious intent because it established that the books were addressed 'to the ignorant, to the credulous, to the desperate.'"<sup>8</sup> The cheap pricing created the opportunity for Alger to reach the lower classes of society. The youth of the working class could realistically afford to read the same works as their more privileged counterparts.

The method and volume of distribution also indicated that Alger reached beyond the educated class and permeated a cross section of American society. During Alger's day, and

after, new trends in publishing radically altered the distribution of the novel. In addition to book merchants and salesmen, two new agents of book selling, mail-order and subscriptions, increased the market for Alger and his contemporaries. By circumventing the middle-man, the publisher was able to sell directly to the reader, keep costs low, and increase the reader's access to the books.<sup>9</sup> The railroad also played an important role in distributing Alger's works. Salesmen traveled by rail to the "Extreme reaches of a gradually expanding market."<sup>10</sup> By these means Alger extended to nearly every facet of the American population.

Alger's popularity during his lifetime was significant. He sold a considerable number of books while alive, including four best-sellers from 1868-1871. By 1897, two years prior to his death, readers bought an estimated 800,000 copies of Alger's works.<sup>11</sup> The people who purchased those books most likely shared them with friends, increasing the estimate of the number whom Alger reached. His works' inclusion in serial form and in library collections only increased the impact of his ideas over a larger readership. A contemporary of Alger noted that "Inquiry at the public library brings out the statement that no juvenile books are more persistently read than those of Horatio Alger."<sup>12</sup> Consistent with their popularity at the library, his stories also enjoyed success in periodicals such as *Student and Schoolmate*. "The readers of the *Schoolmate* looked with too



much eagerness for the monthly chapters" of Alger's stories, clear indication of the author's popularity as a serial author.<sup>13</sup>

After Alger's death his popularity resurged. By 1910 sales of his republished novels reached one million annually.<sup>14</sup> His message of self-help and of ethnic difference now reached across time. During his life his main accomplishment was disseminating his agenda to readers who *may not* have experienced the events about which he wrote. After his death that achievement reached boys who, because of their age, *could not* have directly experienced the settings that inspired Alger's writing. Today, those who read Alger's works indirectly experience life in late nineteenth century America. Understanding this does not require one to compare Alger's fiction to primary non-fiction accounts of his subjects (which the collector of such data mediates anyway). Instead, understanding the place of the novel in history is sufficient to explain how Alger's books are important historical subjects. Conventional historians and scholars may charge that the novel is not an acceptable source of historical study as it lacks sufficient method and research. This is not the case, however as a number of respected scholars would challenge the rejection of the novel as historically irrelevant. These scholars are those who study alternative sources and their cultural importance.

Traditional historical sources are, like the novel, written. Manuscripts, written testimonies, legally recognized documents, memoirs, diaries, statistics, and more constitute the bulk of the traditional historical rootstock. But they, like the novel, are subject to the interpretation of the historian. The existence of these sources is also subject to the judgment of the collector and/or transcriber of the information. The use one makes of an accepted historical source varies with the climate within which the historian is writing as does the reader's interpretation of the secondary author. Summarily one can deduce that historical data is subject to the intellectual and cultural forces that exist at the time of their transcription and at the time of their retrieval for secondary or tertiary use.

Historical study is not limited to static documents and accepted historical sources. The novel has a special place in historical study. Like the accepted piece of historical data the novel is molded by the author's life experiences. Just as the director of the United States Census dictates what information is collected for future reference based on his or her perception of what statistics are most vital as related to his or her past experiences, so does the novelist write with an arbitrary bias based on similar grounds. The end products are similar in their arbitrary nature and usefulness in a variety of modes.

Likewise, the novel is not a mere object for leisurely reading. According to prominent scholar and



material culturalist Thomas Schlereth, many objects including the seemingly absurd are worthy of attention from historians. He writes to "...urge the scholarly examination of tract housing, children's toys, mail order catalogs, tombstones, hall furnishings, and mobile homes."<sup>15</sup> With readable objects such as tombstones and catalogues included in this list, it is safe to say the novel is also worthy of historical study. It, like the objects which Schlereth enumerated, represents the historical period within which the author penned it. It represents both the author and the culture which influenced him or her. It is also important as an influence over culture.

The cultural importance of the novel is an issue addressed by many scholars. According to Melville Herskovits the interconnection of object and people and communities is the essence of this cultural understanding. The novel and other objects are priceless for understanding the relationship of humankind with the physical world. They not only "Delight our fancy" but are symbols of the meanings of our cultural adaptations.<sup>16</sup> The novel and object become important when seen in the light of this opinion but according to Schlereth it, is not the multitude of interpretations of objects that strengthens the study of non-traditional sources.<sup>17</sup>

The novel is also often discredited as insignificant for its classification as an art form. This, however, is its strength. As an art form the novel is included in the

study of human production and influence. It is these considerations of the novel as part of the on-going formation and modification of American culture that makes it relevant to the study of American history. The novel is not only the three-dimensional material form of the author's interpretation of America but it is also a representation of American culture itself. It is also a tool that perpetuates the growth of culture through the dissemination of opinions, understandings, and identities. The written word is part of America's cultural identity as it is shaped by the ideas of the author and as it shapes the ideas of the readers. It is a part of the living process of the acculturation of America.<sup>18</sup>

If this is not enough to convince skeptics of the historical significance of the novel, additional scholars have written specifically on this subject. When their opinions merge, they demonstrate that fiction is important historical evidence. One scholar, William B. Hesseltine, an opponent of studying pure artifactual evidence, assessed the importance of the written word to his studies and concludes that written documents are the most reliable of all artifactual resources. Of these, he noted, the historian is able to "ask" questions and receive answers.<sup>19</sup> This is understandable as literary sources provide a direct human link when viewed as artifactual evidence. Values and ideas are communicated literally rather than symbolically. The scholar does not have to interpret vague symbols and

representations but only has to analyze the meaning of words. In other words, literature is readily disposed for scholarly analysis. It is an object but with the added benefit of the traditional method of historical record, the written word.

Wilcomb E. Washburn also supports the novel, but as a physical object. He writes that "manufactured," material objects, give a better description of the reality of the time of production. This, coupled with the belief that manuscript sources are merely manufactured objects, leads to the conclusion that there is no distinction between the two.<sup>20</sup> Summarily fiction, viewed as an intended manufactured object, is useful as a barometer of history as are manuscript sources intended as records. Even though scholars should draw some distinctions between traditional and non-traditional historical sources the importance of one should not override the other.

These two previous scholars conclude that literature and other written artifacts are important for determining historical climates. Their arguments place the novel in a marginal position, a sort of cross-roads of scholarship, functioning as both object and document. The novel is therefore the physical means of distribution of the written word and the associated ideas. John A. Kouwenhoven writes of the importance and significance of literature, clarifying its role in the study of history. Like others, he relates the novel to artifactual evidence and writes of the symbolic

importance of literary sources. Described as "Clusters of verbal symbols" the novel is important to history as a conveyance of the writer's emotions and ideas about a particular experience. Using the example of Chicago slum life, Kouwenhoven writes:

The novel is a cluster of verbal symbols whose arrangement conveys to us, with more or less precision, the emotions and ideas aroused in the writer by those particulars of Chicago slum life that he happened to experience. The writer's emotional responses to Chicago slum life, and his ideas about it, may be in themselves significant facts of American culture, especially if the novel communicates them to many readers, or even to a few who act in response to them. But these emotions and ideas, and the novel that conveys them, are not Chicago slum life. That is something that can be known only by direct sensory experience; and if you or I experienced it, its particulars might arouse in us emotional ideas very unlike those we acquire from the novel.<sup>21</sup>

Although lengthy, this quote is the key to understanding the historical importance of the novel. First of all Kouwenhoven notes that a writer's product is intentional by evidence of the "verbal symbols." These are not haphazard collections of words but an organized discourse of ideas that develops from the author's experiences. The novel is thus an interpretation of events. Whether the basis for the circumstances in the novel are of primary or secondary experience, the end result is an opinion formed by the writer. When based on primary experience, such as Alger's observation of post-bellum America, the validity of the novel as historical record is stronger. It is not a recounting of past events or secondary data but an

interpretation of what Alger witnessed. This is comparable to the artist who paints a scene on location, or the photographer who captures a moment on film.

It is easy to see that Kouwenhoven and the others accept the novel as historically significant based on judging such works as one person's interpretation of events. But Kouwenhoven mentions something his colleagues do not. In what is perhaps more important than the novelist interpreting historical events Kouwenhoven writes that the novel is a source for understanding and action for the reader. He concludes that without the reader experiencing the events which the novelist portrays, there is little challenge to the validity of the novelist's interpretation of events. If the reader does not compare the novel's account of history to other accounts of the same events or subject the reader has no course but to assume that the novelist's interpretation is accurate. This is of importance to the historian. When no accounts of an obscure event exist, save for the novel, it becomes the sole source of understanding of such events. This also holds true when reliable accounts exist but are not available to the reader of fiction. When a novelist presents an account of obscure events, people (such as ethnic Americans), or places, and no alternate interpretation exists or is available, the reader may conclude that the novelist's account is accurate.

As Kouwenhoven wrote, this acceptance of a novel's interpretation is significant in that individuals, few or

many, may accept and act on the "facts" presented by an author, regardless of the accuracy of those "facts." This is the importance, and possible danger of the novel in history, readers assuming that novels are indisputable in their accounts of events, and holding and disseminating these potential inaccuracies. The novel is therefore a source of historical identification. People compare all other historical knowledge to the picture which the novelist presents. Readers more easily accept the novel, already an interpretation of events, than they do empirical historical documents such as legal manuscripts and statistics. For those alienated from these sources by scholarship, the novel is the only means of understanding some events. The prospect of the novel becoming the basis for historical understanding also increases when time and geography separate the reader from events and situations.

Interjecting Horatio Alger, Jr. into this theory indicates that the readers held his opinion of ethnic Americans. His stereotypes of the non-Anglos spread across the country and over time through the system of publication and distribution. His works were important because he had great popularity and exposed millions of juveniles to places they never saw. He also offered his readers inspiration for climbing the social and economic ladders of American society. More important aspect of Alger's writing, however, were that he interpreted the presence of ethnic Americans in such a way as he included in his novels; that his

interpretation reached millions of impressionable Americans; that his readers could easily adopt his views of ethnic Americans; and that his views became part of America's cultural history.

respective books, the most concise and reliable is by Gary Scharnhorst, *Horatio Alger, Jr.* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1969). Scharnhorst included a "Chronology of significant dates in the life of Alger and the Alger family. Events important to the life of Horatio Alger, Jr. include: The arrival of the first Alger in America near Taunton, Mass., ca. 1660; Horatio Alger, Jr. born Jan. 13, 1832 in Chelsea, Mass.; Attends Harvard, 1848-1852; First publication in *Pictorial National Library*, 1849; Attends Cambridge Divinity School, 1857-59; Published first juvenile fiction, *Frank's Family*, 1854; Minister of Unitarian Society of Brookline, Mass., 1864-1866; Resided in New York and wrote *Leaves of Grass* juvenile novels, 1870-1896; Died in South Norwalk, Conn., Jan. 18, 1899.

<sup>2</sup>Carol Hackenoff, *The Mythical West: Horatio Alger and American Political Discourse* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 41.

<sup>3</sup>Hackenoff, 89.

<sup>4</sup>Hackenoff, 263.

<sup>5</sup>Scharnhorst, 140.

<sup>6</sup>"At Our Desk," rev. of Mark the Match Boy, *Commonwealth Schoolmate*, 13 (June 1869), 290. See also Scharnhorst and Jack Sales, *Horatio Alger, Jr.* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1969), 140.



1While several authors recounted the life of Alger in their respective books, the most concise and reliable of these is Gary Scharnhorst. *Horatio Alger, Jr.* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980). Scharnhorst included a "Chronology" of significant dates in the life of Alger and the Alger family. Events important to the life of Horatio Alger, Jr. included: The arrival of the first Alger in America near Taunton, Mass., ca.1665; Horatio Alger, Jr. born Jan. 13, 1832 in Chelsea, Mass.; Attends Harvard, 1848-1852; First publication in *Pictorial National Library*, 1849; Attends Cambridge Divinity School, 1857-1860.; Published first juvenile fiction, *Frank's Campaign*, 1864; Minister of Unitarian Society of Brewster, Mass., 1864-1866; Resided in New York and wrote nearly one hundred juvenile novels, 1866-1896; Died in South Natick, Mass., June 18, 1899.

2Carol Nackenoff. *The Fictional Republic: Horatio Alger and American Political Discourse.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) 41.

3Nackenoff, 89.

4Nackenoff, 263.

5Scharnhorst, 140.

6"At Our Desk," rev. of *Mark the Match Boy, Student and Schoolmate*, 23 (June 1869), 290. Rpt. in Gary Scharnhorst and Jack Bales. *Horatio Alger, Jr.: An Annotated*



*Bibliography of Commentary and Criticism.* (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1981) 31.

<sup>7</sup>"Holiday Books," *New York Tribune*, 19 Dec., 1896, 8. Rpt. in Scharnhorst and Bales, 42.

<sup>8</sup>Thomas Wentworth Higginson. "Children's Books of the Year," rev. of *Frank's Campaign*, *North American Review*, 102 (Jan. 1866), 244-243. Rpt. in Scharnhorst and Bales, 28.

<sup>9</sup>"The Last of the Children's Books," rev. of *Rough and Ready*, *The Nation*, 30 Dec., 1869, 587. Rpt. in Scharnhorst and Bales, 31.

<sup>10</sup>"Books for Boys," rev. of *Frank Hunter's Peril*, *Literary World*, 26 Dec., 1896, 480. Rpt. in Scharnhorst and Bales, 43.

<sup>11</sup>"New Books and New Editions," rev. of *Victor Vane*, *The Critic*, 29 June, 1895, 476. Rpt. in Scharnhorst and Bales, 41.

<sup>12</sup>Nackenoff, 245.

<sup>13</sup>"Children's Holiday Books," rev. of *Risen from the Ranks*, *The Nation*, 3 Dec., 1874. Rpt. in Scharnhorst and Bales, 34.

<sup>14</sup>Warren Susman. *Culture as History.* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) 249. Rpt. in Nackenoff, 59.

<sup>15</sup>Nackenoff, 60.

<sup>16</sup>Nackenoff, 243

<sup>17</sup>Nackenoff, 40.

<sup>18</sup>Nackenoff, 263.

<sup>19</sup>Nackenoff, 160.

<sup>20</sup>Nackenoff, 267-238. (New York: The Federalist, 1967)

<sup>21</sup>Scharnhorst, 109. (Henceforth, *Tommy Salomon*.)

<sup>22</sup>The sample of Alger books used is derived from a limited availability of volumes due to the scarcity and fragility of his works in original and early form. Likewise, recent reprintings of most of his works are not available.

Chapter 2

<sup>1</sup>Horatio Alger Jr. *Tom The Boot Black*. (Chicago: M.A. Donahue & Co., n.d..) Henceforth, *Tom*. The date which appears in parentheses is not the date of the edition used. It is the original date of copyright according to Ralph D. Gardner. *Horatio Alger, Jr. Or the American Hero Era*. (New York: Arco Publishing, 1964). All further parenthetical dates are copyright dates taken from Gardner. Because these copyright dates are considered fact, and because of Gardner's alphabetically organized bibliography of Alger's works, specific page numbers will not be provided. According to Gardner this story made its first appearance in 1873 as "The Western Boy; or The Road to Success."

<sup>2</sup>Alger. *Adrift in New York; Or, Tom and Florence Braving the World*. (Chicago: M.A. Donahue & Co., n.d.) 56. Henceforth, *Adrift*. Alger regularly identified the ethnic origin of his characters within his texts; the ethnic origin of all names used by Alger is verified in Patrick Hanks and Flavia Hodges. *A Dictionary of Surnames*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>3</sup>Paul Prescott, 267.

- <sup>3</sup>Alger. *The Young Salesman*. (New York: The Federal Book Company, n.d.) 28. Henceforth, *Young Salesman*.
- <sup>4</sup>*Young Salesman*, 16.
- <sup>5</sup>Alger. *Andy Gordon; or, The Fortunes of a Young Janitor*. (Cleveland: World Syndicate Publishing Co., n.d.) III. Henceforth, *Andy Gordon*. This edition of *Andy Gordon* contains no page numbers. Chapter numbers are used instead.
- <sup>6</sup>Alger. *Bob Burton; or The Young Ranchman of the Missouri*. (Chicago: M.A. Donahue & Co., n.d.) Henceforth, *Bob Burton*.
- <sup>7</sup>*Bob Burton*, 144 - 145.
- <sup>8</sup>*Young Salesman*, 242.
- <sup>9</sup>*Young Salesman*, 16-18.
- <sup>10</sup>Alger. *Jed the Poorhouse Boy*. In Alger, *Struggling Upward and Other Works by Horatio Alger, Jr.* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1945.) Henceforth, *Jed*.
- <sup>11</sup>*Jed*, 510.
- <sup>12</sup>*Jed*, 511.
- <sup>13</sup>*Jed*, 511.
- <sup>14</sup>*Jed*, 512.. 55.
- <sup>15</sup>*Jed*, 513.. 55-56.
- <sup>16</sup>*Jed*, 514.. 235.

<sup>4</sup>*Bob Burton*, 17.

### Chapter 3

- <sup>1</sup>Alger. *Paul Prescott's Charge*. (Chicago: M.A. Donahue & Co., n.d.) Henceforth, *Paul Prescott*.
- <sup>2</sup>*Paul Prescott*, 269.
- <sup>3</sup>*Paul Prescott*, 273.
- <sup>4</sup>*Paul Prescott*, 267.

<sup>5</sup>Alger. *Struggling Upward; or, Luke Larkin's Luck*. In *Struggling Upward and Other Works by Horatio Alger, Jr.*, 118. Henceforth, *Struggling*.

<sup>6</sup>Alger. *Adrift in New York; or, Tom and Florence Braving the World*. (Chicago: M.A. Donahue & Co., n.d.) Henceforth, *Adrift*.

<sup>7</sup>*Adrift*, 21.

<sup>8</sup>*Adrift*, 75.

<sup>9</sup>*Adrift*, 99.

<sup>10</sup>*Adrift*, 23.

<sup>11</sup>*Adrift*, 24.

<sup>12</sup>*Adrift*, 98.

<sup>13</sup>*Adrift*, 77. *as Snobden's Office Boy*. (Garden City, N.Y.)

<sup>14</sup>*Tom*, 94-95. Henceforth, *Tom*.

<sup>15</sup>*Tom*, 105.

<sup>16</sup>*Tom*, 99.

<sup>17</sup>*Tom*, 110.

<sup>18</sup>Alger. *Bob Burton*. Chapter 4.

<sup>1</sup>*Bob Burton*, 55.

<sup>2</sup>*Bob Burton*, 55-56.

<sup>3</sup>*Bob Burton*, 235.

<sup>4</sup>*Bob Burton*, 17.

<sup>5</sup>*Bob Burton*, 18.

<sup>6</sup>*Bob Burton*, 42.

<sup>7</sup>*Bob Burton*, 213.

<sup>8</sup>*Bob Burton*, 214.

<sup>9</sup>*Bob Burton*, 173.

<sup>10</sup>Bob Burton, 214-216.

<sup>11</sup>Bob Burton, 76.

<sup>12</sup>Bob Burton, 150.

<sup>13</sup>Bob Burton, 20.

<sup>14</sup>Bob Burton, 146.

<sup>15</sup>Bob Burton, 263.

<sup>16</sup>Tom, 199.

<sup>17</sup>Tom, 201.

<sup>18</sup>Tom, 205, 209.

<sup>19</sup>Adrift, 129.

<sup>20</sup>Adrift, 133.

<sup>6</sup>Phil, 202.

#### Chapter 5

<sup>1</sup>Alger. *Silas Snobden's Office Boy*. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1973) 40. Henceforth, *Silas Snobden*.

<sup>2</sup>*Silas Snobden*, 41.

<sup>3</sup>*Silas Snobden*, 78-79.

<sup>4</sup>*Young Salesman*, 163.

<sup>5</sup>Alger. *Phil the Fiddler; or, The Story of a Young Street Musician*. In *Struggling Upward and Other Works* by Horatio Alger, Jr. Henceforth, *Phil*.

<sup>6</sup>*Phil*, 346-347.

<sup>7</sup>*Struggling*, 66-67.

<sup>8</sup>*Struggling*, 30.

<sup>9</sup>*Struggling*, 8-13.

<sup>10</sup>*Struggling*, 4.

<sup>11</sup>*Struggling*, 29.

<sup>12</sup>*Struggling*, 4.

- <sup>13</sup>Struggling, 6.  
<sup>14</sup>Struggling, 44.  
<sup>15</sup>Struggling, 85.  
<sup>16</sup>Struggling, 115.  
<sup>17</sup>Struggling, 86.

## Chapter 6

- <sup>1</sup>Phil, 286.  
<sup>2</sup>Scharnhorst, 38.  
<sup>3</sup>Phil, 316.  
<sup>4</sup>Phil, 240.  
<sup>5</sup>Phil, 288.  
<sup>6</sup>Phil, 282.  
<sup>7</sup>Phil, 311.  
<sup>8</sup>Phil, 282.  
<sup>9</sup>Phil, 283.  
<sup>10</sup>Phil, 298.  
<sup>11</sup>Phil, 367.  
<sup>12</sup>Phil, 378.  
<sup>13</sup>Paul Prescott, 132.  
<sup>14</sup>Phil, 301.  
<sup>15</sup>Phil, 338.  
<sup>16</sup>Phil, 286.  
<sup>17</sup>Phil, 293.  
<sup>18</sup>Phil, 309.  
<sup>19</sup>Phil, 301.  
<sup>20</sup>Phil, 308.  
<sup>21</sup>Phil, 283.

<sup>22</sup>Phil, 385-386.

<sup>23</sup>Phil, 292.

<sup>24</sup>Phil, 330.

<sup>25</sup>Phil, 319.

<sup>26</sup>Phil, 324.

<sup>27</sup>Phil, 299.

<sup>28</sup>Phil, 378.

<sup>29</sup>Phil, 301.

## Chapter 7

<sup>1</sup>Alger. *Ragged Dick; or, Street Life in New York.* In *Struggling Upward and Other Works by Horatio Alger, Jr.*, 177. Henceforth, *Ragged Dick*.

<sup>2</sup>Adrift, 51.

<sup>3</sup>Adrift, 100.

<sup>4</sup>Adrift, 56.

<sup>5</sup>*Ragged Dick*, 251.

<sup>6</sup>Adrift, 58.

<sup>7</sup>Adrift, 60-61.

<sup>8</sup>*Ragged Dick*, 251.

<sup>9</sup>*Silas Snobden*, 177.

<sup>10</sup>*Paul Prescott*, 7.

<sup>11</sup>*Paul Prescott*, 8.

<sup>12</sup>*Paul Prescott*, 261.

<sup>13</sup>*Paul Prescott*, 262.

<sup>14</sup>*Paul Prescott*, 262.

<sup>15</sup>*Paul Prescott*, 263.

<sup>16</sup>*Paul Prescott*, 264.

- 17 *Tom the Boot Black*, 244.
- 18 *Tom the Boot Black*, 233.
- 19 *Struggling Upward*, 31.
- 20 *Struggling Upward*, 32.
- 21 *Silas Snobden*, 198.
- 22 *Silas Snobden*, 200.
- 23 *Silas Snobden*, 207.
- 24 *Tom the Boot Black*, 19.
- 25 *Tom the Boot Black*, 19.
- 26 *Tom the Boot Black*, 20
- 27 *Ragged Dick*, 212.
- 28 *Ragged Dick*, 215.
- 29 *Ragged Dick*, 233.
- 30 *Phil*, 295.
- 31 *Phil*, 333.
- 32 *Phil*, 370.
- 33 *Phil*, 383.
- 34 *Adrift*, 54.
- 35 *Jed*, 514.
- 36 *Jed*, 513.
- 37 *Andy Gordon*, IV.
- 38 *Andy Gordon*, IV.
- 39 *Andy Gordon*, V.
- 40 *Adrift*, 54.
- 41 *Silas Snobden*, 191.
- 42 *Tom the Boot Black*, 2.
- 43 *Phil*, 368-369.



## Chapter 8

- <sup>1</sup>Nackenoff, 237.
- <sup>2</sup>Scharnhorst 1980, 88.
- <sup>3</sup>Horatio Alger, Jr. "Writing Stories for Boys," *The Writer*, (March, 1896) 37. Rpt. in Nackenoff, 25.
- <sup>4</sup>Joshua Brown. "Into the Minds of Babes: Children's Books and the Past." In Susan Benson-Porter et al., ed. *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986) 74.
- <sup>5</sup>Nackenoff, 244-245.
- <sup>6</sup>Nackenoff, 223.
- <sup>7</sup>Nackenoff, 249.
- <sup>8</sup>Olivia Smith. *The Politics of Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984.) 64. Rpt. in Nackenoff, 225.
- <sup>9</sup>Donald Sheehan. *This Was Publishing, A Chronicle of the Book Trade in the Gilded Age*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1952) 240.
- <sup>10</sup>Sheehan, 240.
- <sup>11</sup>Scharnhorst, 1980.
- <sup>12</sup>"Books for Young People," rev. of *The Five Hundred Dollar Check*, *Literary World*, 19 Dec., 1891 495. Rpt. in Scharnhorst and Bales, 39.
- <sup>13</sup>"Tangled Threads," rev. of *Ragged Dick, Students and Schoolmate*, 21 (May 1868) 234. Rpt. in Scharnhorst and Bales, 30.
- <sup>14</sup>Scharnhorst, 141.

- <sup>15</sup>Thomas J. Schlereth, ed. *Material Culture: A Research Guide*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1985) xii.
- <sup>16</sup>Melville Herskovits. *Cultural Anthropology*. (New York: Knopf, 1963) 119. Rpt. in Schlereth, 1985, 5.
- <sup>17</sup>Schlereth, 1985, xiii.
- <sup>18</sup>Schlereth, 1985, xiii.
- <sup>19</sup>William B. Hesseltine. "The Challenge of the Artifact." In Thomas J. Schlereth, *Material Culture Studies in America*. (Nashville: The American Association For State and Local History, 1982) 98.
- <sup>20</sup>Wilcomb E. Washburn. "Manuscripts or Manufacts." In Schlereth, 1982, 102-103.
- <sup>21</sup>John A. Kouwenhoven. "American Studies: Words or Things?" In Schlereth, 1982, 86.

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