PAUL MOFFETT

All Children Must Be in Class: Popular Representations of Class and Childhood in Nineteenth-Century America

The depictions of children in George Thompson's *City Crimes* (1849) and in R. F. Outcault's *Yellow Kid* (1895-1898)[1] exemplify classed constructions of nineteenth-century urban children in America. Thompson represents children as innocent. To Thompson, children need protection

[1] Outcault's "Yellow Kid" comics feature the same characters, setting and theme throughout, but were published under four discrete titles. The titles illustrated by Outcault (sometimes with and sometimes without a collaborator) are *Hogan's Alley*, published by the *New York World*, and *McFadden's Row of Flats, Around the World with the Yellow Kid* and *Ryan's Arcade*, all published by the *New York Journal*. In addition, *Hogan's Alley* was for some time drawn by another artist, George Luks, after Outcault left the *World*. For the sake of clarity, and since I will be talking about all four of these as a single unit, as most critics and comics historians do, I will refer to Outcault's comics as *The Yellow Kid,* which is the title under which they are most often anthologized and conventionally cited, despite never being the official title of the comic. I will also occasionally refer to Hogan's Alley, which is the setting of the early strips, and to the Yellow Kid, who is the central character. I will not discuss Luks's strips.

since they are susceptible to harm or corruption. Outcault, by contrast, represents children as wild and chaotic. Outcault's children are threatening. Both represent children in a classed way—either as representatives of bourgeois purity in Thompson, or as a threat to bourgeois safety in Outcault. Likewise, both represent children in ways that illuminate changing perspectives on the city: in Thompson children are threatened by the city; in Outcault the city is threatened by children. The representation of urban children in these texts demonstrates a shift in the class association of childhood in the nineteenth century, from bourgeois in *City Crimes* to working class in *The Yellow Kid.*

Karen Sanchez-Eppler's "Playing at Class," an analysis of class and childhood in nineteenth-century America, posits that these categories "are both highly visible yet often undertheorized features of nineteenth century American identity" (40). She argues that part of the reason for the undertheorization of both childhood and class is that "national ideologies of class promise that in the United States poverty, like childhood, is merely a stage to be outgrown" (40). If class and childhood are both merely temporary stages, they do not necessarily demand any deep theoretical engagement. But class is not simply a stage of (social) life. Even assuming the truth of the ideological claim that poverty is a stage to be outgrown, class is a marker of identity. Sometimes that class identity remains even after the poverty has been outgrown. Often the poverty is not outgrown at all. Childhood, which is also an identity, is necessarily temporary. If class and childhood are conflated it is partly in order to make a disingenuous claim that class is an identity that is as easily shed as is childhood. Sanchez-Eppler imagines childhood as "a powerful site" (40) for the development of class identity.

Sanchez-Eppler's argument is based partly on the idea of childhood as a social construction. She writes that "the invention of childhood entailed the creation of a protracted

period in which the child would ideally be protected from the difficulties and responsibilities of daily life" (40). The social constructivist bent of most contemporary identity theory would accept this assertion of the social construction of childhood without difficulty. Anyone convinced by Judith Butler's argument about gender in *Gender Trouble* or by Frantz Fanon's argument about race in *Black Skin, White Masks* will accept Sanchez-Eppler's argument about childhood without difficulty. If childhood is socially constructed, that does not mean that there have not always been people who had lived seven, or twelve, or sixteen years, but the social expectation that goes along with the socially constructed identity of "child" is an aspect of the social context.

The idea of the invention of childhood was first raised by Phillipe Ariès in his social history *Centuries of Childhood*. Ariès argues that "in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist" (128). This absence does not, according to Ariès, suggest a lack of care or affection for people whom we would now think of as children. Rather it means that once a person had grown beyond the fragility of infanthood, "he belonged to adult society" (128). There was no segregation, physically or ideologically, between children and adults. Ariès asserts that our concept of childhood developed in the seventeenth century, remarking upon the class difference in the conception of children. Ariès notes that in the seventeenth century, middle-class and aristocratic families developed new conventions of dress for children, but

> the children of the lower classes, the offspring of the peasants and the artisans, those who played on the village greens, in the craftsmen's workshops, in the tavern taprooms and in the kitchens of great houses, went on wearing the same clothes as adults: they were never depicted in robes or false sleeves. They kept up the old way of life which made no

> distinction between children and adults, in dress or in work or in play. (61)

According to Ariès, childhood, in its original inception, was classed.

Sanchez-Eppler makes a similar observation when she argues that "in nineteenth-century America childhood itself is increasingly recognized as a sign of class status" (40)—specifically, middle-class status. If we accept Sanchez-Eppler's assertion that childhood is constructed in nineteenth-century America as "a protracted period in which the child would ideally be protected from the difficulties and responsibilities of daily life—ultimately including the need to work" (40)—then the ability to be a child is the privilege of the wealthy.

James Kincaid summarizes Ariès's and Sanchez-Eppler's key shared assumption in his book *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture*. Kincaid writes that the effect of Ariès's analysis is "to show that the child is the perceptual frame we have available to us for fitting in just about anything we choose—or nothing. What the child *is* matters less than what we *think* it is and just why we think that way" (62; Kincaid's emphasis). It is by virtue of this argument that we can fruitfully focus on representations of children without appealing much to the fidelity of those representations to the lived experience of literal children.

The appeal to perceptual frames is also why popular literature is so valuable as a site for the examination of cultural constructs. Popular literature, purely by virtue of its popularity, is both a mirror of and also as an influence upon public perception. Depictions of childhood and children become popular because they resonate with widely-held intuitions, and through their popularity are widely diffused in culture and therefore permeate public consciousness. Outcault's *Yellow Kid* comics and Thompson's *City Crimes* are two apt examples of the representation of urban children in popular literature that tell us how childhood was imagined in

the urban nineteenth century. What they show is that childhood was imagined, rather than objectively described, and that it was imagined in concert with class.

City Crimes was popular both in the sense that it was directed to a general readership rather than to a refined or specialized readership and in that it enjoyed wide readership. According to editors David S. Reynolds and Kimberly R. Gladman, "City mysteries fiction was an internationally popular genre of the mid-nineteenth century" (x) and George Thompson is a part of the genre's popularity. Reynolds and Gladman quote a *Police Gazette* notice of 1850 that announces "City Crimes! The rapidity with which this REALLY THRILLING NOVEL has disappeared from the counters of periodical dealers, and the still active demand for the work, has induced us to reprint this master work" (xv). *City Crimes* is a sensationalist story of crime, grotesquery, and depravity. The first representation of childhood in *City Crimes* is the self-representation of Maria Archer. Maria is a "courtezan" (Thompson 112) who tells the story of her life to the heroic Frank Sydney, with the intention of explaining and excusing her current situation. She relates how as a young woman she was drugged and raped[2] by a man she subsequently married, who then forced her into prostitution. This outcome—which is, to put it mildly, unlucky—came to pass because Maria had previously been deprived of the protection of her seemingly respectable, middle-class parents. She lost this protection, she relates, because as a child of twelve years old, she witnessed her mother and the minister Reverend Flanders engaging in "obscene and lecherous preliminaries [followed by] the full measure of their iniquity" (113). The young Maria reacted to this scene with dismay: "Horrified, and sick at heart, I left the spot and repaired to my own room, where I shed many bitter tears, for the dishonor of my mother and

[2] Although in the text Maria says she "rather sought than avoided this consummation," it seems clear that her passions are manipulated by the drug. The term "date rape" did not exist at the time of the writing of *City Crimes*, but I think that rape is the appropriate term to use here.

the hypocrisy of the minister filled me with shame and grief. From that moment, I ceased to love and respect my mother, as formerly" (113). She is repulsed by the behaviour of the adults she had taken to be moral exemplars.

The representation of young Maria is an excellent example of Thompson's representation of children as innocent. There are two closely connected concepts of innocence at play here. The word "innocence" comes from Old French and means "without harm" or "without wickedness." In one sense of the word, then, Maria is more morally pure than her parents simply because the twelve-year-old Maria has not yet had an opportunity to transgress the moral and social lines her mother has. That innocence-by-omission is not all that is at work here, however. By a Christian doctrine of Original Sin, all children are innocent in the sense that they have not yet committed sinful acts, but they are still guilty in the sense that they are inclined towards sin. Just as a sheet of paper may be white until it has been written on, or contrarily may be laminated and not writable, so by this understanding of innocence a child may be "innocent" but not morally good. But Maria is also innocent in the sense of moral superiority. She is innocent not only in that she has not yet acted wickedly, but also in that she resists wicked action. The ideology of pollution and defilement that carries throughout *City Crimes* is visible here. The child is pure, but risks corruption through contact with the evil world of adults, which may extend to the child the opportunity to commit wicked acts, and also may inculcate the desire to commit them. The story reinforces the myth of childhood innocence and purity, and of the corrupting effects of time.

The risk of Maria's corruption through contact with her wicked parents is a thematic foretaste of the attempted corruption of Jack the Prig. Frank Sydney's nemesis in *City Crimes*, a disfigured and merciless criminal called "the Dead Man," has a son, Jack the Prig, who recites his catechism at his father's request:

> ‘What is your name?
>
> ‘Jack the Prig,’ answered the boy without hesitation.
>
> ‘Who gave you that name?’
>
> ‘The Jolly Knights of the Round Table.’
>
> ‘Who made you?’ asked the father.
>
> ‘His Majesty, old Beelzebub!’ said the child.
>
> ‘For what purpose did he make you?’
>
> ‘To be a bold thief all my life, and die like a man upon the gallows!’
>
> Immense applause followed this answer.
>
> ‘What is the whole duty of man?’
>
> ‘To drink, lie, rob, and murder when necessary.’
>
> ‘What do you think of the Bible?’
>
> ‘It’s all a cursed humbug!’
>
> ‘What do you think of me—now speak up like a man!’
>
> ‘You’re the d—dest scoundrel that ever went unhung,’ replied the
>
> boy, looking up in his father’s face and smiling. (135)

This scene is a parody of the Christian catechism, a reversal of the Biblical injunction to “train up a child in the way he should go” (Prov. 22:6). But while the Dead Man, as father and catechist, presents a distorted morality to his son, the boy’s reaction actually affirms the catechism as a practice. Jack the Prig is obedient to his father and attentively learns by rote the principles by which he will live. Though in a certain sense we can predict that Jack the Prig will become a depraved adult, the catechism scene is a parody precisely because Jack approaches his depraved catechism with all the purity and innocence with which a child should approach it. It is

not clear that the child understands that his father is valorizing things typically considered transgressive. On the contrary, his actions—looking up in his father's face and smiling, for example—signal innocence, and affection and obedience to the father he says is a damned scoundrel.

Though Jack the Prig is on one level a symbol in the novel of bourgeois anxieties about the reproduction of criminals and criminality, he is also a symbol of the assumption that childhood is a time of innocence and purity. This dichotomy is perfectly represented in his name: Jack the Prig. As defined by George Matsell's *Vocabulum*, a "Prig" is a thief (Matsell 69), but the alternative meaning, as defined by the *OED*, "a person who cultivates or affects supposedly correct views on culture, learning, or morals, which offend or bore others" also applies. Jack the Prig cultivates what he supposes to be the correct view on morals, as they are taught to him by a moral authority in the person of his father.

When the Dead Man does not have the means to corrupt children, as he does with his own son, he commits violence upon them. The Dead Man, an avatar of city crime, either corrupts, kills, or maims children. When the Dead Man tells the story of his early life as a criminal, he tells his companion:

> I stepped into an adjoining room where the two children of Mrs. Ross were sleeping; they were twins, a boy and a girl, three years of age, and pretty children they were. I drew my pocket knife, to cut their throats; just then they awoke, and gazed upon me with bright, inquiring eyes—then recognizing me, their rosy cheeks were dimpled with smiles, and they lisped my name. (Thompson 229)

The innocent, bright, smiling children conform to the exact same ideology of childhood that

Thompson mobilizes in his depiction of Jack, smiling at his father. We should read Jack's as precisely the same smile. The Dead Man continues, relating his attitude toward the twins:

> Perhaps you think their innocence and helplessness touched my heart—hah! No such thing; I merely changed my mind, and with the point of my knife cut out their beautiful eyes! Having first gagged them both, to prevent their screaming. Delicious fun, wasn't it? (229)

On one level this story is simply exploitative gore calculated to establish the Dead Man as the most deplorable villain possible. The depiction of children is telling, however. These three-year-old twins, bright, rosy-cheeked, and lisping, are Thompson's picture of ideal innocence. They are also classed. They are the children of "a wealthy gentleman" (228), for whom the Dead Man once worked "in a menial capacity, my object, of course, being robbery, and other crimes" (228). The Dead Man eventually comes upon the twins again:

> [The] children were still pretty, though they were blind; and it almost made me laugh to see them grope their way to their mother's side, and turning their sightless eyes toward her, ask, in childish accents,—'Mamma, what made the naughty man put out our eyes?' . . .
>
> . . .
>
> . . . [The] Dark Vaults were not a fit place of abode for the blind babes, and so I sent them to take up their abode in another place, and that was heaven; to explain, I cut their throats, and threw their bodies into the sewers. (231)

Again, the children are as symbolic as they are actual. Their sweet innocence is a contrast to the Dead Man's depravity, and provides a suitably vicious crime for him to commit. In addition to

positioning the children as victims *par excellence*, however, the twins also demonstrate what for Thompson is the class trajectory of the city. The children are reduced from wealth to poverty and finally to death in the sewer. As represented by these children, then, the trajectory of childhood in the city is downwards. As classed subjects they do not—as Sanchez-Eppler suggests is the nineteenth-century presumption—grow out of poverty but into it. This downward trajectory is a symptom of the city in general, not only of crime in the city, though for Thompson in this novel crime is inseparable from the city.

The boy-thief Kinchen is a particularly interesting case because at the time of his introduction in the novel, he is not innocent in the first sense of innocent-by-omission. He has been a thief, and his name as the novel originally gives it, "Kinchen," means boy thief. After he meets Frank Sydney, Kinchen exchanges the name "associated with crime" (151) for his own proper name, Clinton Romaine, and promises to serve Frank Sydney evermore. Clinton Romaine is a liminal figure, who moves within the novel from criminality to respectability to victimhood and back to respectability. He is threatened firstly with corruption—his identity as Clinton is under threat of erasure, to be replaced by "the Kinchen"—and secondly with bodily harm. The Dead Man mutilates Clinton, cutting out his tongue, ostensibly so that Clinton can never "testify in court" (166) against the Dead Man. In addition to its plot significance, however, this mutilation is like the mutilation of the two innocent children in that it represents the threat that corrupt adulthood poses to children. Despite his guilty actions, Clinton is still innocent in his substance. Part of the evidence of this substantial innocence is the ease of his redemption. Though physically tortured, he is not tempted to return to criminality. In addition, his naiveté in conversation with the Dead Man is evidence both of vulnerability—the vulnerability that

manifests itself in his disfigurement—and of the kind of honesty that is also trusting. The Dead Man has helped to frame Frank Sydney for murder, and Clinton innocently tells the Dead Man "there are two witnesses, whose testimony can and will prove his innocence" (165). Not only does Clinton thus provide the Dead Man with the motive to cut out his tongue, he also inadvertently points the Dead Man toward Sydney's aunt, Mrs. Stevens. He goes so far as to give Mrs. Stevens's address to the Dead Man. Clinton's lack of suspicion and inability to predict the Dead Man's villainous actions signal his own innocence.

Thompson's figures are not unique. Deborah Thacker argues that "child figures in adult fiction" in the mid-nineteenth century "all serve the purpose of challenging the corrupted adult world" ("Victorianism" 42). While we might qualify her claim of "all," she does note a real trend. Thacker remarks that in the works of Dickens, for example, innocent children often die to redeem the corrupt adult world. In an American context, "in the mid-nineteenth century, the figure of the child is also a redemptive emblem" (51), coupled with the America-as-child trope that "frequently blurs the boundaries between adult and children's fiction in the American canon" (51). Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* and Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* are two examples of American literature about children that enjoyed both adult and child audiences. Because they are enjoyed by both adult and child audiences, they are able to represent childhood to children as well as representing it to adults. Both were published later than *City Crimes,* in 1868 and 1876 respectively, and though neither is concerned with children in the city—Alcott's children are suburban, while Twain's are from the country—both Alcott and Twain represent children in terms that emphasize innocence and even refinement, and that associate childhood with the middle class. These texts and Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* are worth noting briefly here, to show how contemporary accounts of

childhood outside the city relate to Thompson's and Outcault's representations.

The dangers threatening Alcott's little women, as Meg articulates early in the novel, relate to inappropriate conduct and other violations of respectable identity; they are never at risk of corruption or dismemberment. The representation of the girls—particularly Beth, whose death keeps her from ever moving away from childhood—echoes Thompson's idea of childhood as innocent. The children in *Little Women*, however, are removed from the threats of the city; they are firmly ensconced within their middle-class suburban context. Jo, a tom-boy, learns to be "a young lady" (Alcott 12), overcoming her early danger of boyishness, and Amy learns to overcome her tendency to be "too particular and prim" (13). Meg begins the novel nearly out of childhood, and she instructs Jo and Amy as to proper behaviour. Unlike either Jo or Amy, she easily puts aside her childhood dreams and desires to become a wife and a mother. Beth maintains her childish innocence through her death. Though she is nearly twenty years old when she dies, she does not seem it. Though the pressures of corruption that are present in Thompson's city are not present in Alcott's suburb, then, the ideological perspective on childhood is much the same here as it is in *City Crimes.*

Twain's country children in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* "belittle an adult community concerned with propriety [and] glorify antisocial behaviour" ("Victorianism" 49). Like Alcott's fiction for children, Twain's novels are less sensationalistic than *City Crimes*, and Tom's trickery and studious avoidance of work are a departure from the idealized or symbolic innocence of children in *City Crimes.* However, Tom is a middle-class figure, and his adventures are an excellent case of Sanchez-Eppler's argument that the ability to play—in Tom's case the ability to pretend to have rough and wild adventures—is a bourgeois privilege. Tom's appearance in the end of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885)

underscores this, as Tom cannot really understand that Huck's adventures were not his own doing. In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* Twain uses the trope of the naive child to offer a more stinging critique of the adult world than he does in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Huck is not middle-class as Tom was, and in this sense *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a departure from the narratives that preceded it. Nevertheless, even when Twain's children—and especially Huck—are most strongly associated with wildness, this wildness is depicted as preferable, even in moral terms, to civilization.

The same representation of children as wild that Twain employs can be seen in *The Yellow Kid*, which coming at the end of the nineteenth century exists in a different context from the mid-nineteenth century *City Crimes*. Thacker writes that depictions of children near end of the century tended to "address a darker, more pessimistic sensibility" (*Testing* 74). *The Yellow Kid* is distinct from the other texts I have referred to most notably because of its form—a newspaper comic strip. It has much of the wildness hinted at in Twain's writings, but is thoroughly urban.

With few exceptions, the characters of *The Yellow Kid* are children, and the adult presence is virtually always depicted as ineffective or powerless. The appearances of adults in *The Yellow Kid* are infrequent enough to be conspicuous, and are therefore worth remarking upon. When we discuss adults in *The Yellow Kid,* however, we are still tacitly discussing children. Since the children are the focus of *The Yellow Kid*, the adults, when present, perform two functions in general. First, they emphasize by contrast the childhood of the major characters, and second, they indicate the relationship of the children to adults. They are therefore always adults-in-relation-to-children, not simply adults as such. In other words, children are the null state in the universe of *The Yellow Kid.* Childhood is the norm and adulthood is the exception.

There are three general categories for adults in *The Yellow Kid.* The first are adults who constitute what we might call scenery rather than characters. Such are, for example, the two adult men in the May 24, 1896 comic where the children visit Coney Island (Figure 1). One of the men is operating the Ferris Wheel, and the other is selling tickets to the "Seaside Museum & Vaudeville Speciality Company." These men are both functions of the setting, mechanisms that allow Coney Island to operate. To the extent that they carry any further significance as adults, it is as official or functionary antagonists to the children. The children on the Ferris Wheel are uniformly unhappy, and the man who turns the wheel is mindlessly performing his official function, completely heedless of the effect his action has upon the children. The other man is simply conning the children out of five cents, the ethics of which we can leave without comment.

Another category of adult presence is the allusive appearance, for example that of Li Hung Chang in the September 6, 1896 comic (Figure 2). Li Hung Chang (Li Hongzhang) is a historical person who visited New York in 1896. His appearance in *The Yellow Kid* is thus a reference to contemporary culture. A similar case is the appearance of Edward VII, then the Prince of Wales in the January 24, 1897 comic (Figure 3). These figures are cultural allusions rather than characters in their own right. Both the allusive and the scenic adults represent the world of adulthood as incidental to the primary mode of existence: namely childhood.

The final category of adult appearances in *The Yellow Kid* is the most interesting— adult characters in a strict sense. Some of these characters are recurring, and a few occur only once, but each is worth our attention for the commentary made upon the relationship of urban children to adults. The most notable of the non-recurring adult characters is the dogcatcher, featured in the September 20, 1896 comic (Figure 4). The dogcatcher is an agent of official authority—albeit

a

Figure 1. "The Residents of Hogan's Alley Visit Coney Island." 24 May 1896.
San Francisco Academy of Comic Art Collection,
The Ohio State University Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum.
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Moffett/Figure%201.jpg

Figure 2. "Li Hung Chang Visits Hogan's Alley." 6 Sept. 1896.
San Francisco Academy of Comic Art Collection,
The Ohio State University Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum.
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Moffett/Figure%202.jpg

Figure 3. "Me and De Prince." 24 Jan. 1897.
San Francisco Academy of Comic Art Collection,
The Ohio State University Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum.
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Moffett/Figure%203.jpg

Figure 4. "What They Did to the Dog-Catcher in Hogan's Alley." 20 Sept. 1896.
San Francisco Academy of Comic Art Collection,
The Ohio State University Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum.
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Moffett/Figure%204.jpg

petty one. As such he is not only an adult, he is also an official representative of adult authority, and, what is more, of bourgeois authority. Though the dogcatcher is not himself necessarily a member of the bourgeoisie, he is their representative here as he attempts to impose order and control.

The children's assault on the dogcatcher has a number of implications. The official representative of the city is not only prevented from carrying out his duty, he is assaulted. More than ineffective, he is endangered. Though it is easy, especially from a contemporary perspective, to equate a love of animals with the antagonism toward dogcatchers, the real prospect of packs of wild, possibly rabid, dogs free in the streets of the late nineteenth-century city should remind us that the dogcatcher is not a merely symbolic representative of order. He is an important part of the maintenance of order that makes it possible for the bourgeois to live in a city. If the children are able to render him completely ineffective—or even to kill him, as one of the children has an axe—the represented threat is not only to him, and not only to bourgeois society, but to the city as a whole.

The threat the children pose is threefold. Firstly it is emblematic of urban anxieties of overcrowding and the associated chaos. Children are one of two groups that represent the growth of the city, the other group being of immigrants (though many of Outcault's children seem to fit easily into both groups). When children overwhelm the representative of order, the threat is that the growth of the city will overwhelm order, and that the city will consequently fail. Secondly, the children and their attack on the dogcatcher are representative of a generational conflict. This partly overlaps with the previous fear, and is the fear that the new generation will outnumber and overwhelm the older one. But it is also a psychologically grounded fear of death. Faced with the youth of children, adults are reminded of their own age and impending death, and consequently

find children threatening. The anxiety here is not just that the population will grow too quickly, it is also that the new generation will supplant the older one altogether. The fear of being supplanted is particularly intense when the children do not respect the ideals or the values of the adults they are replacing. Hooligan children are threatening symbolically because as adults we hope that our values or ideals will survive us because children will uphold and preserve our legacy. The fear is that the upcoming generation will utterly disregard the symbolic authority of the past, thus ensuring that the ideological death of the older generation will accompany its inevitable physical death. The fact that the Hogan's Alley children exercise violence upon an adult who is also an official representative of adult order merely underscores this anxiety. Finally, there is a class-based conflict at work here. The children are poor, street children. Their violent action against the representative of the state points to late nineteenth-century fears of a class-based revolution. Jacob Riis's 1890 book *How the Other Half Lives* provides a portrait of homeless children or "Street Arabs" that is a precursor of Outcault. Riis seems at least partly motivated in his depiction of urban poverty by the fear of a violent uprising. He writes that the relative attractiveness of New York tenements from the outside is in fact a problem, since it "helps to delay the recognition of their true character on the part of the well-meaning, but uninstructed" (15). If recognition is too long delayed, the poor may take action, and Riis reminds his readers that the "'dangerous classes' of New York long ago compelled recognition" (150). Riis may be referencing the riots of 1863, which he invokes in his introduction. Tyler Anbinder, in his history of the New York neighbourhood *Five Points*, explains that the Draft Riots were caused by the anger of low-income New Yorkers "who disdained the war [and] might be dragged into it against their will" (Anbinder 314). The conscription clause "that allowed a draftee to pay $300 in lieu of enrolling" (314) meant that the rich could avoid it while the poor could not. The

class-based riots were "the bloodiest week in [New York's] entire history" (314).

Riis's term "the dangerous classes" is not his own, but was used by fellow documentarian of the New York poor, Charles Loring Brace, who entitled his book *The Dangerous Classes of New York and Twenty Years' Work Among Them.* Brace was a minister and social reformer who founded the Children's Aid Society, and is "perhaps the preeminent figure in American child welfare history" (O'Connor xvii-xviii). He is quite clear about what he means when he calls the poor of New York the "dangerous classes." Brace writes:

> All these great masses of destitute, miserable, and criminal persons believe that for ages the rich have had all the good things of life, while to them have been left the evil things. Capital to them is the tyrant. Let but Law lift its hand from them for a season, or let the civilizing influences of American life fail to reach them, and, if the opportunity offered, we should see an explosion from this class which might leave this city in ashes and blood. (29)

Riis echoes Brace's unambiguous evocation of class-based urban violence. In the final section of *How the Other Half Lives,* Riis compares the poor to the ocean, and writes that "during the fierce storms of winter it happened that this sea, now so calm, rose in rage and beat down, broke over the bluff, sweeping all before it. ... The sea of a mighty population, held in galling fetters, heaves uneasily in the tenements" (296). Like Brace, Riis considers the poor to be not only pitiable, but also dangerous.

It is difficult to imagine that any of Outcault's readers were unfamiliar with the ideas raised by Riis, Brace, and others like them. The urban poor were a threat to the bourgeoisie. The worse their situation, the more they were not only a shame to, but actually a potential threat to,

the upper classes. Because the inhabitants of Hogan's Alley are mostly children, they are the representatives of the urban poor *par excellence.* As A. A. Berger argues in *The Comic-Stripped American*, "Hogan's Alley and its inhabitants ... represented everything that was anathema to the American democrat" (27). They express the democrat's anxiety about the failure of American democracy, and hence of America as a whole.

The dogcatcher is perhaps the most dramatic example of these anxieties as represented in *The Yellow Kid*—because the comic is one of Outcault's most violent—but there are many other adult figures in the strip who are objects of violence or derision at the hands of the children. Several of the comics feature a police officer, for example, who, if not intended to be always the same character, is at least always a representative of the same character type. In some of the comics, such as the "McFadden's Row of Flats" from October 25, 1896 (Figure 5), this police officer appears to scold or possibly threaten the children but they completely ignore him. In others, such as the comic from October 17, 1897 (Figure 6) he is subject to mild violence from the children. In no case does he successfully impose order upon the children. Though he is a less dramatic example than the dogcatcher, then, his function in the strip is the same.

The comedy of *The Yellow Kid* comics diffuses somewhat the threatening nature of the children, but also arises in part from that same sense of threat, which is often simply articulated in terms of difference. Humour comes from the subverting of expectations, and much of the humour of *The Yellow Kid* comes from the representation of children doing adult things. The children do not behave like earlier representations of children (in Thompson for example) have taught the audience to expect children to behave, and that is funny. The failure of their attempts to recreate adult life simply heightens the humour. For example, "Golf, the Great Society Sport," the comic from January 5, 1986 (Figure 7), is funny, as the title of the comic notes, because golf

Figure 5. "Say! We Are Bound for 5th Ave." 25 Oct. 1896.
San Francisco Academy of Comic Art Collection,
The Ohio State University Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum.
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Moffett/Figure%205.jpg

Figure 6. "The Yellow Kid T reats the Crowd to a Horseless Carriage Ride." 17 Oct. 1897.
San Francisco Academy of Comic Art Collection,
The Ohio State University Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum.
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Moffett/Figure%206.jpg

Figure 7. "Golf – The Great Society Sport as Played on Hogan's Alley." 5 Jan. 1896.
San Francisco Academy of Comic Art Collection,
The Ohio State University Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum.
http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Moffett/Figure%207.jpg

is a "great society sport." The Hogan's Alley children's violent and chaotic version is simultaneously a parody of the pretensions of the great society sport and a joke at the expense of the poor children who cannot understand high society. The further the kids' outcome deviates from what they are faithfully attempting to reproduce—the more violent their golf game, for example—the more both of these two comedic effects are achieved. And that is why it is important to the humour that children of Hogan's Alley are poor. They are removed from what they are imitating as much by class as by age, and again the disparity is the source of the humour.

Sanchez-Eppler argues that childhood play is the privilege of the middle-class, but simultaneously argues that poverty is frequently imagined in the nineteenth century as a kind of childhood. So middle-class and wealthy children play, and in so doing they symbolically play at being poor. While childhood is the privilege of the wealthy, then, childhood and poverty are also conflated. The wealthy have the power to move in and out of childhood—to play at poverty and then stop the play, while for the poor childhood and poverty are both permanent. Childhood and poverty are certainly conflated in *Hogan's Alley*. The humour of poor people imitating the pastimes of the rich comes from the exact same place as the humour of children imitating the pastimes of adults. Just as it is doubly funny when children perform activities associated with adults because both children and adults—or even more pointedly both childhood and adulthood—are the butt of the joke, so too is it doubly funny when poor people imitate rich and make a joke of both poverty and of wealth. So as Outcault's *Yellow Kid* comics are a representation of childhood, they are also a representation of poverty. A.A. Berger argues that the children of Hogan's Alley "represent the mysterious world of the poor, a world made famous by Horatio Alger, except that Alger's heroes were able to struggle upward and escape from

poverty" (25). The perpetual childhood that was to become such a hallmark of comic strips has its seeds here. Though comics featuring the Yellow Kid were only published regularly for about three years, the stasis of the character (and all the characters) is already evident. Even three years is enough for a child to age. But the Yellow Kid—whose very name denies the possibility of aging—is completely static. He does not age; his hair does not grow; he only very rarely changes his clothes. If childhood is equated with poverty here, then both the Yellow Kid's poverty and his childhood are inescapable.

There is an undertone to even the funniest *Yellow Kid* strips that emphasizes the hopelessness of poverty. A strip featuring poor children could hardly help making a social point. This undertone is why Berger writes that "*The Yellow Kid* is not really an innocent entertainment. It has social dimensions even though they are not apparent. It expresses, though perhaps not consciously, a sense of malaise" (31). These violent, chaotic, dirty children, continually bandaged or risking death or injury, without any adult care or supervision are not entirely funny. Berger argues that "in *The Yellow Kid*, the sense of fantasy and use of humour masked a sense of despair" (27).

Pace Berger, it could be argued that the humour and the despair arise from the same place. While Ragged Dick can, through a mix of patronage and a good work-ethic, rise out of his poverty, the situation of the Yellow Kid and his compatriots is permanent. The manic energy that provides the fantasy and part of the humour for the Yellow Kid is also a nihilistic chaos, and the fact that the kids of Hogan's Alley do not work is partly escapist romanticism and partly a spectre of the city overrun by citizens who do not produce. The Hogan's Alley children are poor, but they are not in need—they are a picture of benign poverty. But they are also a picture of a poverty that is a drain upon society. Outcault's pictures are crowded and "exceedingly busy,

sometimes with as many as fifty human figures and a half-dozen (or more) animals of various

Figure 8. "Say! We Are Bound for 5th Ave." 25 Oct. 1896. Detail.
San Francisco Academy of Comic Art Collection,
The Ohio State University Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum.

http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Moffett/Figure%208.jpg

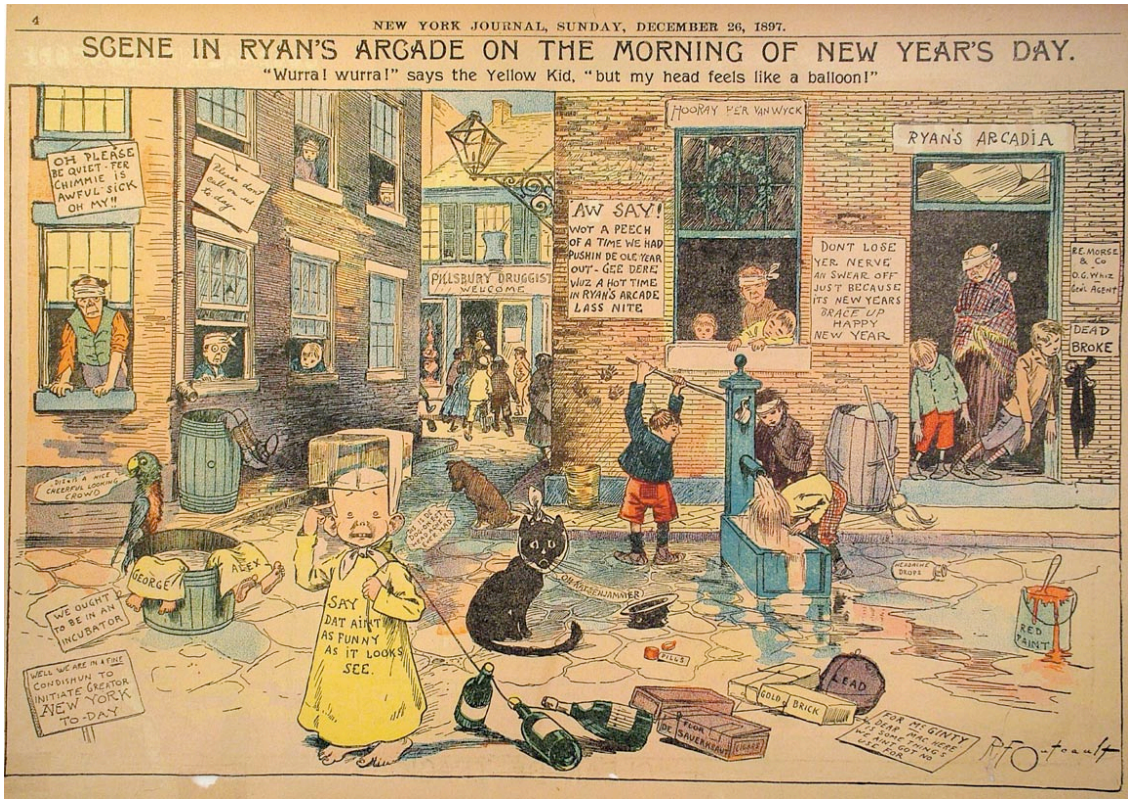

Figure 9. "Scene in Ryan's Arcade on the Morning of New Year's Day." 26 Dec. 1897. San Francisco Academy of Comic Art Collection, The Ohio State University Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum.

http://journals.library.mun.ca/ate/v2/Moffett/Figure%209.jpg

kinds" (Berger 25), and that crowded chaos is easy to read as symbolic of the American city. Berger's assertion that "the ambiance was chaos, with bodies sticking up everywhere and crowding the space in the cartoon, just as it was felt that we were beginning to get crowded in America" (27) aptly describes the relation of image to anxiety.

The fact that the kids do not work also suggests that they do not have the means to change their situation. They do not have the material means, the money, but neither do they have the kind of moral and ethical training Horatio Alger lauds in *Ragged Dick.* At the novel's conclusion, Dick is able to take advantage of the charity of a benefactor because in the course of the novel he has learned thrift, reading and writing, and arithmetic. The thrust of the narrative has prepared him to successfully translate the generosity of a wealthy man into his own upward mobility. The kids of Hogan's Alley do not have the same narrative thrust, because there is no continuity between weeks. There is no mechanism by which these children's lives can be changed, and Outcault occasionally makes that part of the gag, as in the October 25, 1896 comic (Figure 8), wherein the Yellow Kid quips: "Dis ain't no continued story, gentle reader."

As a picture of poverty, then, Outcault's comics are bleak. Alger's narrative is a bourgeois fantasy of "taming" street kids, but Outcault shows the same need without presenting any possible solution. Alger may offer the poor a false, or a naive, or a patronizing hope, but Outcault offers no hope at all. Perhaps the most succinct commentary on the depiction of children in Outcault's *Yellow Kid* comics is that presented by the Yellow Kid himself in one of his last appearances, on December 26, 1887, anticipating New Year's Day: "this ain't as funny as it looks" (Figure 9).

Though Thompson's sensationalist crime-novel is not attempting to tread the same ground as is Outcault's newspaper comic, the changing representation of children is suggestive of changing cultural sensibilities about class, about the city, and about the future. Thompson's children represent innocence threatened by the corrupt city, and Outcault's represent the city's dangerous classes and dangerous future. For both Thompson and for Outcault—as well as for Alger, Alcott, and Twain—the depiction of children is conspicuously classed, and childhood

exists in essentially classed terms. Though Thompson's children are typified by innocence and vulnerability, and Outcault's by wildness and exuberance, both representations of urban children show how class conflict is encoded in the idea of the child. Class and childhood are both social constructs, and both are entrenched through representation.

MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND

WORKS CITED

Alcott, Louisa May. *Little Women.* Eds. Anne K. Phillips and Gregory Eiselein. New York: Norton, 2004. Print.

Alger, Horatio. *Ragged Dick.* New York: Norton, 2008. Print.

Ariès, Philippe. *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*. Trans. Robert Baldick. New York: Knopf, 1962. Print.

Berger, Arthur Asa. *The Comic-Stripped American*. New York: Walker, 1973. Print.

Blackbeard, Bill. *R.F. Outcault's The Yellow Kid: A Centennial Celebration of the Kid who Started the Comics*. Northampton: Kitchen Sink, 1995. Print.

Brace, Charles Loring. *The Dangerous Classes of New York, and Twenty Years' Work Among Them.* Elbiron Classics, 2005. Print.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990. Print.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 1967. Print.

Gordon, Ian. *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture: 1890-1945*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998. Print.

Harvey, Robert C. *Children of the Yellow Kid: The Evolution of the American Comic Strip*. Seattle: Frye Art Museum, 1998. Print.

Kincaid, James R. *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture.* New York: Routledge, 1992. Print.

Matsell, George Washington. *Vocabulum*. Clark, NJ: Lawbook Exchange, 2005. Web. 20 March 2011.

O'Connor, Stephen. *Orphan Trains: The Story of Charles Loring Brace and the Children He Saved and Failed*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2001. Print.

Outcault, R. F. "Golf-The Great Society Sport as Played in Hogan's Alley." *New York World.* 5 January 1896. *The Ohio State University Cartoon Research Library*. Web. 23 March 2011.

---. "The Residents of Hogan's Alley Visit Coney Island." *New York World.* 24 May 1896. *The Ohio State University Cartoon Research Library*. Web. 23 March 2011.

---. "Li Hung Chang Visits Hogan's Alley." *New York World.* 6 September 1896. *The Ohio State University Cartoon Research Library*. Web. 23 March 2011.

---. "What They Did to The Dogcatcher in Hogan's Alley." *New York World.* 20 September 1896. *The Ohio State University Cartoon Research Library*. Web. 23 March 2011.

---. "McFadden's Row of Flats." *New York Journal.* 25 October 1896. *The Ohio State University Cartoon Research Library*. Web. 23 March 2011.

---. "The Yellow Kid Treats the Crowd to a Horseless Carriage Ride." *New York Journal.* 17 October1897. *The Ohio State University Cartoon Research Library*. Web. 23 March 2011.

---. "Scene in Ryan's Arcade on the Morning of New Year's Day." *New York Journal.* 26 December 1897. *The Ohio State University Cartoon Research Library*. Web. 23 March 2011.

"Prig, *n.3*" *OED online.* March 2011. Oxford UP. Web. 6 May 2011.

Riis, Jacob. *How the Other Half Lives*. New York: Norton, 2010. Print.

Sanchez-Eppler, Karen. "Playing at Class." *The American Child: A Cultural Studies Reader*. Eds. Caroline F. Levander and Carol J. Singley. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2003. 40-61. Print.

Thacker, Deborah Cogan. "Victorianism, Empire and the Paternal Voice." *Introducing Children's Literature: From Romanticism to Postmodernism*. Eds. Deborah Cogan Thacker and Jean Webb. New York: Routledge, 2002. 41-55. Print.

---. "Testing BoundAriès." *Introducing Children's Literature: From Romanticism to Postmodernism*. Eds. Deborah Cogan Thacker and Jean Webb. New York: Routledge, 2002. 73-84. Print.

Thompson, George. *City Crimes; or Life in New York and Boston. A Volume for Everybody: Being a Mirror of Fashion, a Picture of Poverty, and a Startling Revelation of the Secret Crimes of Great Cities*. 1849. *Venus in Boston and Other Tales of Nineteenth-Century City Life*. Eds. David S. Reynolds and Kimberly R. Gladman. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2002. 105-310. Print.

Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.* New York: Norton, 1977. Print.

---. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer.* Ed. Shelley Fisher Fishkin. New York: Oxford UP, 2010. Print.

Wood, Mary. "The Yellow Kid on the Paper Stage." Feb 2, 2004. Web. 23 Mar. 2011.