

Comparative Enfreakment: Rhetorical History of the Lives and Exhibitions of Chang and Eng Bunker, The Original Siamese Twins”

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Samuel T. Allen, PhD

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The lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng Bunker offer a case study to reconsider scholarly accounts of the politics of curiosity, representation of differences, and public techniques of social exclusion and inclusion. The conjoined twin brothers’ exhibitions worked to sustain and contest liberal formations of nation, race, gender, sexuality and class grounded in 19th century conceptions of possessive individualism. The invention of the “Siamese Twins” began in the convergence of colonial curiosity, liberal discourses of free trade, and notions of individual self-possession that gave way to racialized and ableist commodification of Chang’s and Eng’s bodies by American and British merchants. The spectacular exhibitions of Chang and Eng as the “Siamese Twins” mixed exoticized and aggrandized modes of racialized enfreakment with popular curiosity and medical curiosity. Chang’s and Eng’s expressions of possessive individualism in 1830s were animated by a series of performances of masculinity, disassociation from slavery, and the construction of a self-made man narrative that included a re-presentation of themselves to the public as “their own men” staging themselves “under their own direction.” Chang and Eng faced a series of oscillating inclusions and exclusions as they became American settler citizens, husbands and fathers, and emerged as part of the slave owning Southern elite in the 1840s and 1850s, and yet became entangled with a rising anti-Asian discourse in their public exhibitions shortly before and after the United States Civil War. Despite appearances of their closely approaching full integration, Chang and Eng were never fully accepted within U.S. society. I suggest scholars

reconsider Chang's and Eng's exhibitions as the Siamese Twins within a framework of "success," arguing a critical and comparative rhetorical history of their lives and exhibitions makes clear that such successes were qualified, conditional, and problematically sustained by their own performative dominion over others. I conclude by highlighting a few ongoing connections of the 19th century discourse to contemporary curiosity in science, medicine, and popular entertainment and close by suggesting that performances of curiosity otherwise are an urgent political praxis for living together in a world of differences.

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Preface

I did not anticipate writing a dissertation about the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng Bunker when I began my doctoral studies at the University of Pittsburgh. In fact, Chang and Eng were not even my initial entry point to the study of conjoined twins lives and exhibitions in the 19th century. This project actually began in an encounter with the show biographies of Millie-Christine McKoy. When Millie-Christine McKoy was born into slavery on a Columbus County plantation on July 11th, 1851, North Carolina doubled the conjoined twin population in the state. Across the state Chang and Eng Bunker, had retired from their lives exhibiting as the “Siamese Twins” and settled in Mount Airy, where they became citizens, husbands, fathers and slave owners themselves. Separated by only a hundred miles, Chang and Eng and Millie Christine occupied very distinct social positions in their lives as North Carolina’s conjoined twins. Born with similarly extraordinary bodies and in the same state, Chang and Eng Bunker and Millie Christine were separated by anti-black American racial formations in the 1850s. So it was Millie-Christine’s show biography/slave narrative that became my entry point to think about the history of race, gender, and disability. As I learned more about Millie-Christine it was common that she was framed in comparison to the “Siamese Twins.” I realized that I would need to understand the history of the “Siamese Twins” to understand the cultural frame of reference of her exhibitions. Ultimately, that turn grew into this dissertation on those “Original Siamese Twins” that would become eponymous with conjoined figures for the next 150 years.

I would like to acknowledge the support of a wide range of people and institutions who have been critical in completing this dissertation. First, this project has been shaped and brought to completion by the support of my incredible committee. Dr. Johanna Hartelius provided me with

my introduction to graduate study of rhetoric, the conceit of rhetorical history, and space to rehash long standing debates about text and context that have shaped my style of doing rhetorical criticism. Dr. Paul Johnson, who joined this project in its later stages, was quick to read drafts of several chapters in development and help excise significant chunks of writing to find focus. Dr. Johnson not only provided valuable feedback on the content of the work, his support as a mentor provided a model for care in academic work that I can only hope to live up to in the years to come. Working with Dr. Todd Reeser in the Gender, Sexuality, and Women's studies program at the University of Pittsburgh provided me with the theoretical equipment to work on ideas of racialized masculinity, as well as a space to connect with scholars and scholarship that grounds the work of the university in crafting feminist futures. Dr. Reeser's support of my scholarship, not only this dissertation, but also my work on affect and masculinity, not only made the work better, but provided me with the confidence it to completion. Dr. Ron Zboray and Dr. Mary Zboray provided support in crafting the manuscript and were invaluable in my professionalization during my graduate studies. It was in their course on Visual Culture Studies that I was first introduced to the trouble of reading 19th century letters (and the pleasure and frustration of reading the penmanship of the era) that peaked my curiosity and appreciation for digging in the archives. It was across a series of meetings with them both that I was able to identify the archives and sources that ground the dissertation. Dr. Zboray's support of my interest in bringing together Cultural Studies and Rhetorical Studies is reflected in the particular approach that I take the writing that follows. Finally, my advisor, Dr. Lester Olson, has been a staunch supporter of my work from the start. Dr. Olson's labor to support my crafting of the dissertation prospectus, applications for grants and fellowships to complete the archival research, and careful attention to the editorial development of the manuscript were essential to completing the work. My approach to rhetorical criticism,

rhetorical historiography, and visual rhetoric are deeply informed by my opportunity to have worked closely with him in the classroom and on this project. However, in the many demands that I made on Dr. Olson's time and energy over the last several years it has been his unwavering commitment to make space for me to work through a sense of how to do meaningful work within the university that has helped me grow as a rhetorical scholar and find grounded purpose in the work. While Dr. Olson often reminded me that, in the final analysis, the project was mine (and I certainly claim all of its deficiencies as my own), this project would not have happened without his care, support and guidance. Thank you for gifting me "capaciousness" and being the best intellectual dancing partner one could ask for.

Completing the research and writing of the project would not have been possible without the financial support of grants and fellowships internal and external to the University of Pittsburgh. The first funding for this project was a Cultural Studies summer grant of \$75 to support the costs of traveling to the burial site of Millie-Christine McKoy and begin to work in the North Carolina State Archives. From that foundational experience, I have benefitted from support from the Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies student research fund at the University of Pittsburgh, the Lucinda Holderness Wilcox and Benson R. Wilcox Library Fund from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and the Archie K. Davis Fellowship from the North Caroliniana Society to complete archival research throughout archives in North Carolina. In addition, an international studies fund grant from the University Center for International Studies and the Frank and Vilma Slater/Scottish Room Committee Scholarship enabled me to carry out archival research in London, Sheffield, and throughout Scotland. Financial awards from the 3-Minute Thesis competition within the Dietrich School of Arts & Sciences and the university wide competition provided support for travel and research. Finally, the time and support to complete the archival

travel and begin drafting the manuscript would not have been possible without the Arts & Sciences Graduate Fellowship in Cultural Studies.

I have also benefitted extensively from the opportunity to share parts of the project in development with scholars within Communication Studies and in a range of interdisciplinary environments. Early feedback from faculty and students in the National Communication Association Doctoral Honors Seminar, including Dr. Cindy Koenig, Dr. Paul Stob, and Dr. Dave Tell, helped to shape my sense of interlocutors within communication studies. Feedback from Dr. Ebony Coletu on an early draft of a chapter regarding Millie-Christine McKoy at the Arnold-Ebbitt Interdisciplinary Rhetoricians conference was critical to introducing me to Christina Sharpe's *Monstrous Intimacies* and helped shape the third chapter. I had the opportunity to receive feedback and support in crafting the first two chapters of the dissertation from my time working with an amazing set of interdisciplinary scholars as part of the Cultural Studies Dissertation Colloquium at the University of Pittsburgh, led by Dr. Ron Zboray. Similarly, early drafts of the first chapter, "From Curiosity to Curiosities," and the concept "comprative monsteratization," were developed with feedback at the National Communication Association and Rhetoric Society of America conferences respectively. Finally, I can not say enough about the supportive environment and feedback from the Racialized Masculinities in Sexual Worlds Workshop led by Casey Kelly and Jeffrey Q. McCune at the Rhetoric Society of America summer institute. In particular, Dr. Kelly provided valuable language to help name the central problems of possessive individualism and Dr. McCune reassured me to let the work speak for itself. This project was made possible, and made better, through the sustained care and engagement of a community of scholars both within Communication and across disciplines. I hope that each of these interlocutors may find something of interest in the project.

Furthermore, this project would not have been possible without the extended network of care and support from mentors that have shaped my approach to teaching and scholarship over the years. Patricia Rich was my earliest model of what it might mean to teach in ways that built learning communities that enriched each and every student in the classroom and beyond. I can say without reservation that my relationship with Pat as debate coach and teacher was the most important factor in pursuing college and a life in teaching. Thank you. Dr. Tracey Owens Patton, who advised me through my B.A. and M.A. at the University of Wyoming, provided my earliest training in the study of race and gender in the rhetorical tradition. In many ways my approach here is continued growth from my work in “Dr. Patton studies” and it was my experiences working closely with Dr. Patton that drew me back to Wyoming for graduate studies in Communication. Thank you. Finally, for the past three years I have worked closely with Dr. Mari Webel in the History Department teaching courses on the History of Global Health and Health Controversies and researching Neglected Tropical Diseases that helped me refine my historical methods and study of health in history. More than that, Dr. Webel showed me that there were other ways of doing academic work and making intellectual communities that made it possible for me to imagine the compatibility of living a full and balanced personal life with the development of a rigorous teacher-scholar persona. Thank you. Perhaps it should not be surprising that it has been the support and care of these incredible women that helped make the space for me to become the scholar I am today.

Finally, this project would not have been possible without the support of friends and family who let me discuss the history of conjoined twins endlessly and with a supportive ear. Thanks go to all of them – named here and not. To Maddie, whose friendship I never lived up to and I think of all the time. To Dr. Eric Chalfant, for always making the calls and persistence in friendship. To

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1.0 Introduction: Comparative Enfreakment: A Rhetorical History of the Lives and Exhibitions of Chang and Eng Bunker, “The Original Siamese Twins”

The exhibitions of Chang and Eng as the “Siamese Twins” continue to shape popular and scholarly meaning making from the significance of the presence of conjoined bodies in a world assumed to be populated by autonomously-embodied individuals. Brought from Siam (now Thailand) to Boston at the age of 18 in 1829, Chang and Eng quickly became recognizable in households throughout Jacksonian America and Victorian Britain. Chang and Eng retired from publicly exhibiting themselves and settled in rural Wilkes and Surrey Counties, North Carolina by the 1840s; around the same time, the notorious P.T. Barnum was only just beginning to oversee “an amusement explosion” in the Northern cities of the United States.¹ Over the course of that decade, Chang and Eng publicly adopted the Bunker surname and became citizens of the United States at a time when such legal rights were restricted to free white persons. Each of them married white sisters, at a time when interracial relationships were considered illicit. Each also owned and operated a farm, owned slaves, and fathered many children. In the 1850s, Chang and Eng Bunker returned to exhibit themselves—along with their growing families—as respected American southern gentlemen across the country. The brothers’ bodies figured prominently in public discourse throughout the union during the Civil War, eliciting an anti-Chinese racism in the final tours before their death in 1874.

While neither the first conjoined twin performers nor the only conjoined twins of the 19th century, Chang and Eng were certainly the most prominent conjoined twin performers of the

¹ Neil Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P.T. Barnum* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1973): 37.

century. In many ways Chang's and Eng's case is exceptional and challenged the notions of possessive individualism and the conception of an autonomous individual subject. Their experiences upended legal and economic doctrines of ownership and contract law, as well as social norms of sexual autonomy and marriage. Moreover, they offered a complicated case for understanding the racialized dynamics of orientalist masculinities. The social, political, and cultural dynamics played out in the exhibitions of "The Siamese Twins" provide a unique case by which to explore modes of inclusion and exclusion in American and British society in the 19th century.

This rhetorical history of the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng Bunker complicates critical and common-sense narratives concerning disability, masculinity, nationalism, orientalism, and gendered-marketplace mythologies. As pre-eminent conjoined performers, Change and Eng impacted "cultural formations in the 19th century, illuminating for scholars the many ways in which audiences negotiated and derived meaning from corporeal differences. By "cultural formations," I mean the processes by which members of cultures negotiate their norms and beliefs. In this dissertation, I contribute to better understanding the changing dynamics of 19th-century national, racial, gendered, and sexual norms by analyzing medical, legal, and popular entertainment discourses by contemporaries who attempt to make sense of the presence of conjoined twin performers. Over the course of the project, I follow the question: What histories of the 19th century can we illuminate when refracted through the lives and exhibitions of the most famous conjoined Asian men of the era?

In pursuit of this question, I closely engage with a range of the archival materials that represent Chang's and Eng's everyday lives alongside their racialized enfreakment as "The Siamese Twins." The theory and praxis that emerges from this study I call "Comparative

enfreakment,” which begins from the assumption that conjoined twins are not “monsters” intrinsically, rather, their bodies are made monstrous through a series of representative and discursive practices, which are themselves contested and change across time and place. Understanding the construction of the figure of the freak as a critical set of practices of knowing, looking, and touching bodies that appear extraordinary to normative social life can provide an important starting point for ethical freak studies.² Grounding the critical and cultural analysis of comparative enfreakment in the materialist analysis of the lives and lived experiences of Chang and Eng offers one practice to resist the normative tendency to reduce the figure of the freak into pure metaphor. Understanding enfreakment comparatively centers the contingent contexts that shaped the narratives of enfreakment and the spaces for living enfreaked lives over the course of the 19th century. It is in the critical, contextual, and comparative modes that racialized enfreakment most clearly articulates relationships of power and contested norms of disability, race, gender, class, and sexuality in the 19th century.

My thesis is that the comparative enfreakment of Chang’s and Eng’s lives and exhibitions complicates narratives of 19th-century disability, nation, race, gender, sexuality and class structured around myths of possessive individualism. The first chapter contends that the invention of “The Siamese Twins” began within the convergence of colonial curiosity with liberal discourses of free trade and notions of individual self-possession, which gave way to racialized and ableist

² On the Freak Studies see Bogdan, Robert. *Freak Shows*, 1988, Garland Thomson, Rosemarie, ed. *Freakery*, 1996; Adams, Rachel. *Sideshow U.S.A.*, 2001; Tromp, Marlene. *Victorian Freaks*, 2008. On Chang and Eng Bunker in Freak Studies see: Wu, Cynthia. *Chang and Eng Reconnected: The Original Siamese Twins in American Culture*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012; Wu, Cynthia. “The Siamese Twins in Late-Nineteenth-Century Narratives of Conflict and Reconciliation.” *American Literature* 80, no. 1 (March 2008): 29-55; Pingree, Allison. “America’s “United Siamese Brothers”: Chang and Eng and Nineteenth-Century ideologies of Democracy and Domesticity.” In *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 92-114. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996; and Joseph Andrew Orser, *The Lives of Chang and Eng: Siam’s Twins in Nineteenth Century America*, UNC Press, 2014.

commodification of Chang's and Eng's bodies by American and British merchants. The second chapter argues the early exhibitions of Chang and Eng as "The Siamese Twins" under the Coffins' ownership and management mixed exoticized and aggrandized modes of racialized enfreakment with popular curiosity and medical curiosity. These early exhibitions of Chang and Eng before prominent medical men brought together medical curiosity with professionalization of medicine and scientific discourses of natural order and bodily autonomy. These discourses became the contested rationales for "corrective" surgery to normalize conjoined twins as separate individuals. The third chapter claims the Coffins' aggrandizing exhibitions of the Siamese Twins in Europe were managed through intimate dynamics of power and control of Chang and Eng by the Coffins and in narratives portraying a civilizing inclusion of the twins into the white family. In chapters four and five, I argue Chang's and Eng's expressions of possessive individualism in 1830s were animated by a series of performances of masculinity, disassociation from slavery, and the construction of a self-made man narrative that included a re-presentation of themselves to the public as "their own men" staging themselves "under their own direction." In the sixth chapter, I claim that Chang and Eng faced a series of oscillating inclusions and exclusions as they became American settler citizens, husbands and fathers, and emerged as part of the slave-owning Southern elite in the 1840s and 1850s, and yet became entangled with a rising anti-Asian discourse in their public exhibitions shortly before and after the United States Civil War. In the conclusion, I review the case for reconsidering Chang's and Eng's exhibitions as the Siamese Twins within a framework of "success," arguing a critical and comparative rhetorical history of their lives and exhibitions makes clear that such successes were qualified, conditional, and problematically-sustained by their own performative dominion over others. I conclude by highlighting a few ongoing connections of the 19th-century discourse to contemporary curiosity in science, medicine,

and popular entertainment and close by suggesting that performances of curiosity remain an urgent political praxis for living together in a world of differences.

In the remainder of this introduction, I orient readers to the scholarly conversations that inform my inquiry, outline the methodological commitments of the project, describe the archive of materials that I analyze, and preview the dissertation's organization. I begin by situating Chang's and Eng's lives and exhibitions as the Siamese Twins in the context of changing dynamics of racialized colonialism, the convergent rise of popular entertainment and the professionalization of medicine, and an emergent celebration of the self-made man in at the turn of the 19th century. Having set out the context and significance of the project, I then explain my approach to rhetorical historiography, define a conception of comparative enfreakment, and describe the construction of primary archival materials that ground the project. I conclude with a brief organizational description of the project, including an elaborated outline of the content chapters.

1.1 Misfitting the 19th Century: Troubles of Possessive Individualism, Racialized Colonialism, Enfreakment, and Self-Made Men

A rhetorical history of Chang's and Eng's lives and exhibitions is a history of the entangled stories of colonialism, slavery, orientalism, and masculinity in singleton society structured around myths of possessive individualism. Chang and Eng misfit early 19th century American and British possessive individualism marked by the celebration of the figure of the self-made man.³ C.B. MacPherson argues that "possessive individualism" is a central assumption of liberal political

3 Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Misfits: A Feminist Materialist Disability Concept," *Hypatia*, 26(3), 2011: 591-609.

thought from Hobbes through Locke that shaped political concepts of freedom, rights, obligation, and justice. MacPherson describes possessive individualism as “the conception of the individual as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them.” At the center of possessive individualism is the notion that an individual is free in that they are the “proprietor of his person and capacities” and society is defined as an “exchange between proprietors.”⁴ Chang’s and Eng’s story both illustrates this notion as much as supports it in that their proximity to power, or modeling of power, can both exemplify and contest hegemonic conceptions of settler citizenship.

Conjoined twins trouble political and social theories that conceive of political and social life as a series of exchange relationships between men imagined as autonomous individuals in possession of themselves and by virtue of their possession of others. Possessive individualism reflects singleton ideology. Alice Dreger uses “singleton” to name the unmarked social center of the autonomous individual in society.⁵ Singleton is a particular extension of Rosemarie Garland Thomas who coin the term “normate” to represent the mutually constitutive unmarked category opposite the “disabled” figure.⁶ The notion of possessive individualism assumes a singleton embodiment. As Dreger notes in her work with conjoined twins, conjoined twins most often develop individuated senses of themselves, what their corporeal connection calls into question are the ways in which individuals’ choices are conceived within a social, political, and cultural framework of presumed corporeal autonomy.

4 C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962): 3; 17-18.

5 Dreger, *One of Us*, 2004.

6 Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997): 8-9.

Chang and Eng also pose racial trouble to the history and theory of possessive individualism. Jennifer Greeson argues that the prehistory of possessive individualism begins in the transatlantic slave trade, which established the idea that people may be taken as “objects of appropriation—to be possessable, exchangeable commodities.”⁷ Charles Mills, Saidiya Hartman, and others, argue that the image of the self-made man that underwrites theories of individualism struggles for coherence when it is taken up directly by women and people of color—since liberal concepts of the subject were never meant to apply beyond propertied white men.⁸ Colonial curiosity converges with liberal discourses of free trade and notions of individual self-possession that give way to racialized and ableist commodification. Chang’s and Eng’s exhibitions as the “Siamese Twins” are fundamentally a struggle over ownership and property and a question of masculinity insofar as that is the ultimate stake of who owns their story and likeness. In this next section, I situate Chang’s and Eng’s lives and exhibitions as the Siamese Twins in the context changing dynamics of racialized colonialism, the convergent rise of popular entertainment and the professionalization of medicine, and an emergent celebration of the self-made man in at the turn of the 19th century.

7 Jennifer Rae Greeson, "The Prehistory of Possessive Individualism," *PMLA*, 127(4), 2012: 919.

8 There is an emergent scholarly conversation around the ways liberalism is commensurate with systems of domination. Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, (Cornell University Press, 2014); Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, (Raleigh: Duke University Press, 2015); Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011). See also Uday Singh Mehta, Paul Gilroy, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Walter Dignolo for other schools arguing that liberal philosophy, culture, economics, and governance are deeply implicated in colonialism, slavery, capitalism, and empire.

1.1.1 19th Century Racialized Colonialism: Possessive Individualism, Slavery, and Freedom to Labor

Robert Hunter's "discovery" of the "Siamese Twins" is a product of both the colonial conditions of his encounter with Chang and Eng and rhetoric of curiosity that rationalized the commodified exhibitions of their conjoined bodies for profit throughout the United States and Europe. Suggesting that the conditions of the encounter along the Meklong River between Chang and Eng and Robert Hunter in 1824 are "colonial" requires a reorientation of previously predominant narratives of Thai historiography and a more capacious understanding of British imperial colonialism. Unlike many of the other nations in Southeast Asia, Thailand was never a formal colony of the British Empire and, as such, has often been treated as an exceptional case in studies of British imperialism and Southeast Asian colonialism. Recent studies have positioned Siam within the scope of British "informal empire" and Thai experiences of colonialism have been variously described as "crypto-colonial," "semicolonial," and "hybrid colonialism."⁹ Situating Robert Hunter's "discovery" of Chang and Eng within a framework of racialized colonialism, I join Thai historians engaging with postcolonial theory and Asian cultural studies that challenge

9 Damodar Ramaji SarDesai. *British trade and expansion in Southeast Asia, 1830-1914*, (New Delhi: Allied, 1977); Michael Herzfeld, "Thailand in a Larger Universe: The Lingering Consequences of Crypto-Colonialism," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 76, 4 (2017); Peter A. Jackson, "The Ambiguities of Semicolonial Power in Thailand," in Harrison, Rachel V. and Peter A. Jackson, ed. *The Ambiguous Allure of the West: traces of the colonial in Thailand*. Vol. 1. Hong Kong University Press, 2010; Thongchai Winichakul, "Siam's Colonial Conditions and the Birth of Thai History," In V. Grabowsky (ed.) *Unraveling the Myths in Southeast Asian Historiography: Essays in Honour of Berend Jan Terweil*, (River Books, 2011). Frequently the 1855 Bowring Treaty, which established a system of liberalized trade rules and regulations between the United Kingdom and the Kingdom of Siam, is cited as a watershed colonial moment in 19th century making of Siam. On the Bowring Treaty as a colonial "mark of subjugation" see B.J. Terweil, "The Bowring Treaty: Imperialism and the Indigenous Perspective," *Journal of the Siam Society* 79, no. 2 (1991): 40; Kullada Kesbunchoo-Mead, *The Rise and Decline of Absolutism in Siam*, (London: Curson, 2005); Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Names and Repetitions of Postcolonial History," in Rachel Harrison ed. *The ambiguous allure of the west: traces of the colonial in Thailand*, (Hong Kong University Press, 2010).

the premise that Thailand emerged outside of influence of European colonization.¹⁰ Acknowledging that Thailand was never formally colonized, Thai modernity is entangled with European military, economic, and religious imperial projection throughout Southeast Asia in the 19th century. Robert Hunter's "discovery" of the "Siamese Twins" has generally been divorced from the history of British colonial empire, but a closer examination of Robert Hunter as a colonial intermediary actor provides a temporal shift in studies of British colonialism in Siam and opens new lines of inquiry about how racialized colonialism was enacted.

Investigation of the obscured convergence between European liberalism, settler colonialism in the Americas, the transatlantic African slave trade, and the expansion of the East Indies and China trades in the late 18th and early 19th centuries in admittedly broad strokes can offer a context for understanding the contracting of Chang and Eng by Robert Hunter and Abel Coffin as an event commensurate with the changing dynamics of British Empire and American colonialism. British mercantile colonialism in the 15th and 16th century was dependent on both settler colonialism of the Americas and West Indies that displaced and disposed of native peoples and the British Atlantic slave trade that transported captured West and Central African people to labor on plantations in the Americas. By the late 18th century, British colonial domination was contested by "transcolonial" rivalries with the Dutch, French and Spanish, the independence of the United States from England, and the recurring revolutionary resistances of enslaved people. Reading along the archival grain of colonial archives, American Studies scholar Lisa Lowe suggests British liberal discourses of "freedom," "free trade" and "free labor," were accompanied by the appearance of the Chinese "coolie" in colonial and parliamentary papers as a transitory

10 Rachel Harrison, and Peter Jackson, ed. *The Ambiguous Allure of the West: Traces of the Colonial in Thailand*, (Hong Kong University Press, 2010).

figure that would enable the professed move “from slavery to freedom” following the Abolition Act of 1807.¹¹ Situating the contracting of Chang and Eng within the emergence of a changing racial colonial model that draws upon “free” Asian labor as a means of dividing and substituting African slave labor helps scholars today to understand colonial racialization of the 19th century. In this sense, perhaps more than Robert Hunter’s “discovery” in 1824, it is Abel Coffin’s contract with Chang and Eng to engage in “free labor” in 1829 that clearly situates the invention of the “Siamese Twins” in the colonial underside of liberal discourses of individual freedom.

Chang’s and Eng’s re-arrival to the United States and negotiation of their position and rumors of their enslavement set the conditions for the brothers to break free from boyish servitude at the age of 21 by asserting that they were “their own men” and constructing themselves as self-made men laboring “under their own direction.” Self-possession and self-made masculinity became the representational force that they used to accumulate some wealth, settle in North Carolina, and become citizens of the United States. In laboring outside of the gaze of the public, getting married and having children, and owning slaves, Chang and Eng Bunker sought to confirm their economic and political status as self-made men in ownership of themselves and lord over others. Pushed to exhibit themselves after the Civil War, the constrained market of labor available to conjoined twins forced the brothers to face an amplified anti-Chinese sentiment that doubled with a moral critique of the brothers as former slave owners. Whatever possessive individualism

11 Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015). The 1807 Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade prohibited slavery on English soil and ended slave trading within the British Empire, but it did not abolish slavery in most of the British Empire until the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833. In March of 1807 the United States adopted an Act Prohibiting the Importation of Slaves provided a path to end the Atlantic slave trade but did not abolish its internal trade of slaves. Understanding the gradualism of abolition of slavery across the Atlantic and Indian oceans opens not toward a progressive narrative of liberal freedom as much as a complex adjustment of the colonial violence of forced labor throughout the 19th century.

the brothers managed to express in their lives, the final exhibitions of the brothers' bodies was a marked assertion of the publics and medical men's presumed rights to their extraordinary bodies.

1.1.2 19th Century Enfreakment: Convergent Rise of Popular Entertainment and Professionalization of Medicine

A rhetorical history of Chang's and Eng's lives and exhibitions includes the entangled stories of medical professionalization and the rise of popular entertainment in early 19th century United States. In the 19th century, monster mongers and monster makers took hold of popular American and British imaginations, not only with the rise of gothic literature, as with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), but in the organized exhibition of extraordinary bodies for popular and medical audiences.¹² Enfreakment was featured in venues ranging from the medical theatre at Harvard to the Bartholomew Fair in London to P.T. Barnum's American Museum in New York City, as the staging of extraordinary bodies became popular features in the lives of the American and British publics.

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's genealogy of freakery from Greek antiquity through United States modernity marks the 19th century as a moment of shifting the discourse of monstrosity from that of sublime wonder to natural error. Garland Thomson notes the Latin etymological variants of monster, such as *monere*, "to warn," and *monstrare*, "to show," were encountered with a sublime sense of awe and fear in the excesses of a presumed natural order. Excavating a history of extraordinary births since antiquity, including conjoined twins and other

12 Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, New York: New York University Press, 1996.

imagined hybrids such as centaurs and sphinxes, Garland-Thomson suggests that the extraordinary body has long been a critical vessel through which human beings attempt to make sense of the world and its variation. “By its very presence,” she writes, “the exceptional body seems to compel explanation, inspire representation, and incite regulation.”¹³ Tracing the place of the extraordinary body in an interpretative schema developed from Aristotle, Cicero, and Augustine, through pre-capitalist societies, and into the 19th century, Thomson’s genealogy reveals the ways in which religious revere and wondrous appreciation for the monstrous body shifts into a pathologized framework of freak error in the 19th century.

As modernity develops in Western culture, freak discourse logs the change: the prodigious monster transforms into the pathological terata; what was once sought after as revelation becomes pursued as entertainment; what aroused awe now inspires horror; what was taken as a portent shifts to a site of progress. In brief, wonder becomes error.¹⁴

Garland-Thomson suggests the 19th century is a period in which the predominance of the sublime account of monstrosity becomes differently placed in public discourse by the professionalization of medicine and popularization of monster mongering exhibition culture. Garland-Thomson’s genealogy reveals the cultural negotiations of the metaphysical reception of monsters with modern medical discourses of bodily normalization and the popular receptions of both. Thomson identifies a shift in freak discourse from wonder to pathology in the enlightenment turn and scientific professionalization of the 19th century.

While the exhibition of monstrous bodies has a long history, the formalization and organized promotion of large spectacle exhibitions was vastly expanded in the 19th century. Richard Altick traces the ways in which exhibition culture expanded from the royal court into town

13 Rosemarie Garland Thomson, “Introduction: From Wonder to Error—A Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity,” In *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson, (New York: New York University Press, 1996): 1.

14 Garland Thomson, “From Wonder to Error,” 3.

halls and hotels alongside the rise of renaissance cabinets of curiosities in which wealthy Europeans would collect, preserve, and study with increasing detail the natural world and its diversity.¹⁵ Similarly, Robert Bogdan offers a history of the rise and fall of the United States freak show, from P.T. Barnum's monster exhibitions in the famed American Museum in New York City in 1840 to the close of most traveling sideshows in the 1920s.¹⁶ Various changes in technology, economies, and social life produced a market for popular entertainment of a primarily white, leisure class.¹⁷ For the price of 10 cents to 25 cents, approximately the cost of a loaf of bread or cut of beef, the exhibitions were available to working class audiences as well as economically well off patrons.¹⁸ Monster mongers took to the growing popular exhibition culture that emerged in the 19th century in the United States and Britain.

Enfreakment, as a complex of rhetorical, historical, and cultural effects, foregrounds ways in which the body becomes entangled within a myriad of practices of knowing the body in modernity. In this case, I foreground discourses of ability, comparative racialization, and masculinity in practices of enfreakment. As "race" has a monstrous past, so too do freaks have a racialized history. Asa Mittman (2012) traces the interlinking of the European modern invention of corporeal racialization schema, coupled with a theory spatial distancing, with "monstrous races" being imagined as uncivilized, barbaric, and threatening. Along with colonialist expansion and the

15 Richard Altick, *The Shows of London*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

16 Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

17 On the development of leisure culture and entertainment industry in the United States and England see Melanie Dawson, *Laboring to Play: Home Entertainment and the Spectacle of Middle-Class Cultural Life, 1850-1920*, (University of Alabama Press, May 2014); Susie L. Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians: Politics, Culture and society in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, (Routledge, August 2016); David George Surdam, *Century of the Leisured Masses: Entertainment and its Transformational Twentieth-Century America*, (Oxford University Press, 2014). For a historical account of the importance of entertainment in consolidating an American of whiteness and class see David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, (Verso, July 2007).

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

transatlantic slave trade, the figures of the “monstrous races” were imagined into the “unknown places,” brought to life by colonial traders, slavers, and settlers’ travel/adventure writings, speeches, and performances. Mittman suggests that as colonialist expansion and slave trade forced massive displacements and interchanges, the racial monster begins to be imagined “inside” the national body in addition to those “out there.” The 19th century exhibitions of conjoined twins in the United States and Britain were carried out in, and carried out, this changing racialization of monstrosity.

My rhetorical analysis of the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng Bunker is grounded in the critical study of 19th century racialized enfreakment. Constructions of Chang and Eng as “The Original Siamese Twins” is in conversation with others who have examined the techniques of constructing “Siam” within the imagined space of the “Far East” and the English colonial expansion in Southeast Asia and the rise of an orientalist discourse “Chinese Problem” at the mid-turn of the century.¹⁹ Edward Said’s *Orientalism* remains a foundational citation for the critical analysis of colonial discourse.²⁰ Orientalism the study of circulation of power among knowledge and cultural producers whose writings and depictions of “The Orient” and not a study of an essential Orient. Orientalism offers a framework for seeing and knowing “The East” as inferior to “The West,” as savage, backwards, diseased, as uncivilized. From within this framework, colonial expansion and its attendant violence was justified, in part, because it was necessary to protect the recognized subjects of the state as well as a benevolent gesture of bringing the Other into modern civilization. Chang’s and Eng’s exhibitions as the Siamese Twins offer complex cases for

19 John Kuo Wei Tchen, *New York Before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882*, (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999):

20 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

considering their commodified trafficking from Siam to the United States and throughout Europe in the 1830s. It also contributes to a comparative understanding of orientalism.

Entangled with a growing popular exhibition culture, throughout the 19th century conjoined twins were frequently exhibited in public and private and under the guise of medical examinations. Chang's and Eng's exhibitions offer a way of refracting the conjoined medical discourses of teratology and phrenology as 19th century natural sciences drew upon a comparative rhetoric of standardization and deviation that arranged monstrous and racialized bodies as distinct from an imagined (white singleton male) norm and in relation to each other. Shifts in the professionalization of medicine over the course of the 19th century had a demonstrable impact on the medical rhetorical framing of extraordinary bodies and further fed the professionalization efforts of medical men. As a companion to the classification schema of conjoined twins, race sciences of the period aimed to classify the types of humankind in popular phrenology.²¹ Teratology, the study of monsters, or, in a more contemporary medicalized valence, the study of abnormal anatomy and physiology has an ancient antecedent. However, it is the 19th century figure Etienne Geoffroy St. Hilaire, a French zoologist interested in anatomy and experimental embryology, who is credited with the establishment of teratology as a branch of scientific study.²² Conjoined twins were particularly important in the development of the development and professionalization of the field of anatomy and physicians' authority over making meaning of human bodies in the early 19th century.²³ Within the 19th century moment of professionalizing

21 Charles Colbert, *A Measure of Perfection: Phrenology and the Fine Arts in America*, (University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Bruce Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic*, (Harvard University Press, 2002); Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, (Norton, 1996).

22 Hilaire's work on chicken eggs and conjoined twins supports a theory of epigenesis and laid the groundwork for teratology as birth defects became scientifically understood as errors in developmental processes due to external influences rather than signs of demonic intervention.

23 Michael Sappol, *A Traffic of Dead Bodies: Anatomy and Embodied Social Identity in Nineteenth Century America*, (Princeton University Press, 2004).

medicine, American medical men sought out extraordinary curiosities to cultivate knowledge at the boundaries, frontiers, or “limits” of thoughts about a natural order generally, and human bodies particularly.²⁴ Thus the study of Chang and Eng, as preeminent conjoined twin performers, is of particular importance to this developing dynamic because of its central role in the public and scientific contestations over what constitutes a “normal” subject. Attendant in the constructions of the normal subject are matters of varying power relationships and structures, including nation, race, sex, sexuality, age, gender, and ability.

Conjoined bodies have a history of drawing human interest and public speculation since antiquity. Elizabeth Grosz argues conjoined twins exist at the limits of normative conceptions of human subjectivity that rely on a notion of the human as an autonomous individual.²⁵ Chang’s and Eng’s exhibitions and lives challenged simple narratives of human normativity. In doing so, they problematized common conceptualizations of racial and gender domination, illuminating taken for granted norms about the normal and the natural as they were brought to bear by spectators who endeavored to comprehend their bodies. More than the mere imaginations of white male managers, study of Chang’s and Eng’s lives and exhibitions as the Siamese Twins enriches our understanding of the distinctive and complex lives of conjoined twins to make such lives more possible.

Early representations and exhibitions of Chang and Eng drew upon orientalist presumptions of Asian opulence and difference. Chang and Eng were brought to the United States in 1829, decades before the first major migration of Asian laborers during the mid-century gold rush and transportation expansion. John Kuo Tchen suggests prior to the immigration of Chinese laborers to California in 1849, “Chinese people were spectacular objects of visual consumption in

24 Elizabeth Grosz, “Intolerable Ambiguity: Freaks as/at the Limit,” in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed Rosemarie Garland Thomson, (New York: New York University Press, 1996): 55-69.

25 Grosz, “Intolerable Ambiguity,” 1996.

the United States.”²⁶ Tchen situates the exhibitions of Chang and Eng alongside those of Afong Moy and the “Chinese Family.” In both cases, an enfreaked orientalist ideology foregrounded opulence of fine goods, such as silks and sugars, and provided popular frames of the “Asian orient” for American audiences.²⁷ This exoticized orientalist frame was translated into the representations of Chang’s and Eng’s performances. Exhibited first as the “Chinese Brothers” and then the “Siamese Twins,” Chang and Eng were framed by white western imaginations of the oriental other and backwardness. Dressed in “traditional oriental” gowns and set in the context of the jungle, the enfreakment of Chang and Eng in the first several years of their exhibitions with the Coffins drew upon cultural assumptions of oriental difference produced in popular media in constructing the link between racial and bodily difference. The linguistic trouble of the Jacksonian conception of manhood as a movement from being a boy to being a man was wrapped up in Chang’s and Eng’s efforts to rhetorically navigate the dynamics of race and ability that constrained their self-made man narratives. Coming of age, from their earliest exhibitions as ‘The Siamese Boys’ into ‘Their Own Men,’ is aligned with coming to voice and the capacity to write their own story. Linked with their ability to enter their own contracts on their own terms and coupled with the capacities to tell their own story in English, coming of age is a key moment in the narrative possibility to become self-made men.

²⁶ Tchen, *New York Before Chinatown*, 31.

²⁷ Tchen, *New York Before Chinatown*, 111.

1.1.3 19th Century Jacksonian and Victorian Masculinity: Self-Made Men, Laboring, & Sexuality

The lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng reveals complicated, shifting histories of hegemonic masculinities in America over the course of the 19th century. Masculinities studies, grounded in feminist praxis, marks the unmarked masculine gender position. While men have long been the unexamined centers of much historical scholarship, the histories of men and masculinity only became matters of historical concern more recently.²⁸ Rather than apply the concept of hegemonic masculinity onto Chang's and Eng's experiences, my aim is to follow closely the changes of those expectations and strategic negotiations of those norms. In this way, my project utilizes close readings of a particular case to rework potentially static assumptions about how hegemonic masculinity operated in a society by discussing the expected and unexpected movements and uses of masculinity.

Critical studies of masculinity proceed from the perspective that masculinity is an effect of ideological representations, discourses, and practices rather than a set of predetermined biological characteristics belonging to men and male bodies.²⁹ Understanding masculinity as a social construction, something that is made and done, a way of knowing and seeing, draws attention to the place of power in gendered relationships over the course of time. While studies at the intersection of Asian American, disability, and masculinity have emphasized Asian male castration and disability dilemma of non-hegemonic masculinities, Chang and Eng provide a curious case of

28 For an introduction to American men's history see Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity From the Revolution to the Modern Era*, (New York: Basic Books, 1993) and Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, 4th ed. (Oxford University Press, 2017).

29 Reeser, *Masculinities in Theory*, 2010.

tenuous exclusion and inclusion within dominant notions of masculinity that complicate the overdetermined positional perspective.³⁰ The construction and reproduction of normative American antebellum masculinity drew upon tactics of inclusion and exclusion of Chang and Eng. Inclusion and exclusion brought them into the American fold against Siamese backwardness and celebrated their corporeal normalcy while at the same time, kept them from fully occupying the masculine ideals. This asymptotic normalization of Chang and Eng, through always-partial inclusion, plays out even in the attempts by Chang and Eng to nuance the constructions of their own masculinity.

As a critical-historical assessment of masculinities in the United States, it is important to understand some contextual factors shaping popular discourse on Asian masculinities in the 1830s. Anthony Rotundo identifies an emergent hegemonic construction of masculine ideals in Jacksonian United States from a communal conceptualization of manhood to an individualist narrative of a self-made man.³¹ American masculinity was structured around the celebration of the rational, autonomous individual. Drawing upon enlightenment epistemologies that linked bodily autonomy and property rights, possessive individualism became a predominant framework for understanding masculinity in relationship to economic and racial logics.³² Of course unstable and provisional features of masculine identity formation due to economic and social dislocations in the capitalist economy, as well as racial, ethnic, and class distinctions, produced hierarchies among men.

30 Eng, *Racial Castration*, 2001; Shuttleworth, Wedgwood and Wilson, “The Dilemma of Disabled Masculinity,” 2012.

31 E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*. New York: Basic Books, 2003.

32 Wu, *Chang and Eng Reconnected*, 2012.

Historians of masculinity argue that hegemonic masculinities in the United States underwent several changes in the 19th century, including the emergence of the “Self-Made Man.” Michael Kimmel argues that the myth of the “Self-Made Man” emerged as a hegemonic framework in the United States in the early 19th century as racialized wage labor and colonial westward expansion became critical and cultural reference points for understanding masculine individualism.³³ Tracing transformations in masculinity from the American Revolution to the 20th century, Anthony Rotundo similarly suggests that hegemonic masculinity in the United States shifted in the early 19th century from a valorization of “communal manhood” to an emphasis on “self-made manhood,” where men demonstrated their capacities to compete and succeed in an economic marketplace, becoming economically self-sufficient.³⁴ Karl Kippola argues that these hegemonic masculine performances were not only coded into law, politics, and social engagements, but were learned and put on display on the American stage in the early 19th century.³⁵ Kippola contends the stage was a critical site for 19th century hegemonic ideological construction. Chang’s and Eng’s staged exhibitions as the Siamese Twins similarly navigated gendered and racialized regulations on staging public performances and became a site for ideological contestation. Understanding the dynamics of how Chang and Eng refused, invited, and strategically performed their own masculinities in relationship to these changing ideas of American hegemonic masculinity helps to thicken the description of such shifts in hegemonic masculinity and the ways it constrained and enabled Chang’s and Eng’s integration into American social life.

33 Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 2017.

34 Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 1993.

35 Karl Kippola, *Acts of Manhood: The Performance of Masculinity on the American Stage, 1828-1865*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

Possessive individualism and the self-made man narrative are wrapped up in normative ideas of labor. At the intersection of bodily normalcy and labor it is not difficult to understand the mutually imbricating difficulties of accessing economic opportunity for those with extraordinary bodies. David Gerber argues that the development of the freak exhibition industry of the 19th century must be understood within the constraints of economic opportunity for those with extraordinary bodies.³⁶ Conjoined twins that became laborers in the exhibition and entertainment industries of the period both confirm and challenge predominant understandings of class and labor in the 19th century. Through their exhibitions, Chang and Eng were able to accumulate livable wages, own property, and exercise mobility not attainable for other black and Asian populations throughout the century. As such, their economic access was both constrained and enabled by their corporeal existence.

Chang and Eng had distinct economic and class access throughout the course of their lives compared with most other conjoined twins or Asian men in the United States. According to the early biography of Chang and Eng constructed in the promotional materials constructed for their exhibitions, Chang and Eng contributed family income in Siam through fishing and selling eggs in their local markets before they ever exhibited themselves for profit. As performers, Chang and Eng were subjected to exploitative contracts from managers, especially early in their careers. As they became more autonomous from external management, they were able to organize more profitable contracts and keep a more significant amount of their wages from their exhibitions. Perhaps most interesting about Chang's and Eng's class mobility was their ability to translate their economic access through exhibition into their work organizing and running a plantation with slaves

36 David Gerber, "The 'Careers' of People Exhibited in Freak Shows: The Problem of Volition and Valorization," in Garland Thomson ed. *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, 1996a: 38–54.

in North Carolina. As slave owners, who could accumulate, contract and exchange property, Chang and Eng were able to translate their economic wealth as a means of becoming part of the American south plantation class and leave behind their work as exhibition performers. After the Civil War and the eradication of their wealth accumulated based on the labor of slaves and the loss of value of confederate monies, Chang and Eng were economically channeled back into the exhibition and entertainment industry. Organizing and performing in tours was exhausting labor for Chang and Eng, especially at this late age of their lives. While Chang and Eng have been characterized as a ‘success story’ and evidence of the possibility of achieving the American Dream, the post-Civil War years of their lives highlights the fleeting access to economic security and the constraints on conjoined twins to enjoy their economic opportunities.³⁷

Public speculation and curiosity surrounding the sexual lives of Chang and Eng has been a commonplace point of public curiosity since their arrival in the United States in 1829. While public discourse often made light of the imagined sexual lives, Chang and Eng and their managers were aware of the troubles the brothers conjoined bodies posed to Victorian sexual norms. As Allison Pingree notes:

[T]he processes usually saved for the most intimate spaces and times—such as romance, sexuality, and reproduction—were for them always a shared experience, on public display. As such, the sexuality of either man, because witnessed—and thus to some extent participated in—by the other, presented prospects transgressive to the Victorian American culture in which they lived: homosexuality (because both were male), incest (because they were brothers), and adultery (because each would, in a sense, be sleeping with a woman not his wife. Therefore, even as the twins were used as emblems of sexual and romantic appeal, their own potential romantic pursuits and marriages were seen as monstrous and perverse.³⁸

37 Stevie Larson, “Making Exceptions: Rethinking Success through the Lives of the Siamese Twins,” *Amerasia Journal*, 39(1), 2013.

38 Allison Pingree, “America’s ‘United Siamese Brothers’: Chang and Eng and Nineteenth-Century Ideologies of Democracy and Domesticity,” in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed., *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996): 105-107.

Chang's and Eng's sexual lives—real and imagined—continuously drew attention from those they were living around and those interested in their lives from afar. Not only do their conjoined bodies pose sexual trouble that raised the specter of homosexuality, incest, and adultery, the brothers' eventual marriages also raised troubles around inter-racial marriages. Their marriages in 1843—Chang Bunker to Adelaide Yates and Eng Bunker to Sarah Yates—were a popular attraction across the country. However, it was not only anxiety around possessive individualism that appeared in the public responses to their marriages, as they married white sisters at a time when such inter-racial marriages were illegal. As Sarah and Adelaide gave birth to their children, the public anti-miscegenation discourse became a prominent headwind the brothers would face as they returned to exhibiting with their children. While Chang and Eng sought to secure their reception as American southern gentlemen through their marriages and reproduction through children, those appeals were always already constrained by public anxiety around their racialized enfreakment.

Chang's and Eng's lives and exhibitions are archived in colonial encounters on the waters of Siam in the context of what Lisa Lowe traces as a shifting liberal discourse of freedom associated with freedom marked as possessive individualism. Scottish colonial merchant Robert Hunter's "discovery" of the Siamese Twins in 1824 and American ship captain Abel Coffin's contract with Chang and Eng in 1829 refract the complexity of the notions of possessive individualism in the context of conjoined brothers faced with a colonial encounter.

It is possible Chang and Eng were similarly contracted to become Coffin's apprentices. Historians have noted the decline of apprenticeship practices in the United States in the early to mid-19th century, while expanding in many ways in England around the same time.³⁹ However,

³⁹ Bernard Elbaum, "Why Apprenticeship Persisted in Britain but Not in the United States," *The Journal of Economic History*, XLIX (2), 1989; Gillian Hamilton, "The Decline of Apprenticeship in North America: Evidence from

Rutha Herndon and John Murray have documented an extensive “pauper apprentice system” in early America where poor, orphaned, or otherwise perceived risky children were “bound out to masters” and “raised to adulthood in a legal condition of servitude.”⁴⁰ In early-to-mid 19th century, over 18,000 children were bound out in legal contracts of indentured labor “that specified the conditions of the apprenticeship,” usually an exchange of daily “maintenance,” literacy education, and skills training for the child, while the child would provide labor and good behavior for the master.⁴¹

The apprenticeship system provides a comparative context to understand the discourse of child labor that appear in the contracting, management, and separation of the brothers from the Coffins.⁴² Both the pauper apprenticeship system and the coolie labor trade illuminate master/servant, parent/child, and family/state relationships that expand the comprehension of labor, parenting, and the proper household in early America. Chang’s and Eng’s contracting centers racialized labor, monstrous intimacies of the white family, and the sanction of Chang and Eng as heads of their own household as they came of age. However, the apprenticeship system does not fully account for the racialized and colonial contexts of Coffin’s contract with Chang and Eng. Herndon and Murray suggest the pauper apprentices were “poor, home-grown, young laborers,” and distinguished from both pauper apprenticeship with traditional craft apprentices as

Montreal,” *The Journal of Economic History*, 60(3), 2000; Alys Levene, “‘Honesty, Sobriety, and Diligence’: Master-Apprentice relations in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England,” *Social History*, 33(2), 2008.

⁴⁰ Ruth Wallis Herndon and John Murray, *Children Bound to Labor: The Pauper Apprentice System in Early America*, (Cornell University Press, 2010): 1. Adulthood was usually defined as twenty-one years of age for boys and sixteen or eighteen for girls.

⁴¹ Herndon and Murray, *Children Bound to Labor*, 1.

⁴² Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015); Lisa Yun, *The Coolie Speaks: Chinese Indentured Laborers and African Slavery in Cuba*, (Temple University Press, 2008); Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation*, (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016). Lisa Yun, for example, uses the term “coolie” to reference the particular social, racialized, and paradoxical position of “Asian bonded labor” that call into question overdetermined notions of “the contract” as it was used “to produce mobile slaves” that could be owned, bought, sold, traded, and disappeared despite being recognized as free to contract their labor. (Yun, *The Coolie Speaks*, 2).

well as slaves and immigrant indentured servants.⁴³ I deliberately situate the contracting of Chang and Eng in the emergent “coolie” trade to highlight the racialized and colonial contexts of their contracted labor.

In a period when British Empire was adjusting to gradual abolition of the transatlantic slave trade a discourse of Asian free labor and the amplification of the “coolie” trade were rhetorically brought into relief. Situating Chang’s and Eng’s earliest exhibitions in the comparative racialized frame of colonialism ties possessive individualism to interconnections of slavery and colonialism. Chang’s and Eng’s contract distinguish them from being recognized as slaves, but the personal letters between Abel Coffin and his wife Susan Coffin slip quickly into the language of ownership that would deny Chang and Eng recognition as possessive individuals. Exhibited under the Coffins’ management in often exploitative and physically exhausting ways—first as exotic Siamese Boys and then as emergent Victorian young men as the Siamese Twins—Chang and Eng were positioned variously as slaves in American and British discourses and they quickly learned the lessons of anti-black slavery and disassociations became ever imperative. It was in recourse to their aggrandizing enfreakment, “which endowed the freak with status-enhancing characteristics,” and the self-made man narrative that Chang and Eng seemed to find ways to approximate white singleton masculinity over the course of their lives.⁴⁴ Chang’s and Eng’s “success story” included their forced separation from Siam and their possession of black men, women, and children. Following this narrative through the end of the Civil War and into period of fervent anti-Chinese rhetoric that culminated in the 1882 Chinese exclusion act, Chang’s and Eng’s lives and exhibitions of the Siamese Twins chart the entangled stories of colonialism, slavery,

⁴³ Herndon and Murray, *Children Bound to Labor*, 2.

⁴⁴ Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit*, (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1988): 97.

orientalism, and masculinity and trouble liberal conceits of possessive individualism. In the next section, I outline the theoretical and practical considerations that inform writing a history of the 19th century as refracted back through the lives of Chang and Eng and their exhibitions as the Siamese Twins.

1.2 Methods and Materials: Rhetorical Historiography, Comparative Enfreakment, and Archiving Curiosity

Rosemarie Garland Thompson offers a framing methodological question for this project: “How do we talk about freaks without reinscribing the oppressive attitudes we attempt to critique?”⁴⁵ In this section, I explain my approach to rhetorical historiography, conception of comparative enfreakment, and describe the construction of primary archival materials that ground the project. In the context of conjoined twins, Daphne Brooks discusses the ways normative historiography is fraught with difficulties when attempting to address “spectacular figures that resist facile categorization in nineteenth-century studies.”⁴⁶ Given the entangled discourses of wonder and singularity alongside race, gender, and ability in the lives of conjoined twins, Brooks encourages an expanded analysis of “racial indeterminacy so as to consider Other figures, other aberrant bodies (of knowledge) who elicit their own uniquely confounding ‘category crises’”⁴⁷ While Brooks’ concern about the fraught categories of the 19th century to understand fully the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng as the Siamese Twins is significant, the extent their corporeal

45 Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “Foreword,” in Marlene Tromp (ed.) *Victorian Freaks: The Social Context of Freakery in Britain*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2008): x.

46 Daphne Brooks, “Fraudulent Bodies/Fraught Methodologies,” *Legacy*, 24(2), 2007: 306.

47 Brooks, “Fraudulent Bodies/Fraught Methodologies,” *Legacy*, 24, 2, 2007: 308.

presence caused category crises is complicated by their tentative inclusions into white American social life, which does not fit easily into the notion of the freak as a crises inducing figure. Starting from the refusal to simply map Chang and Eng onto prefigured ideological coordinates, theoretical concepts can emerge from close engagement with archival materials to highlight the ways in which commonplace narratives of exclusion of social difference in the study of disability, race, and gender in the 19th century misfits the history of the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng as the Siamese Twins. As with Marlene Tromp, my aim is to “contest discourses that naturalize race, gender, sexuality, and disability as categories describing bodily attitudes rather than as structures that emerge from social relationships” and “focus on rendering visible the effects of culture on freakery and of freakery on culture.”⁴⁸ In the archive of the enfreakment of Chang and Eng as the Siamese Twins is a reservoir of public discourse about how conjoined twins challenged and confirmed popular understandings of the normative body, race, nation, gender, and sexuality.

My rhetorical history is a critical, cultural, and comparative account of the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng as the Siamese Twins. There are already several popular biographies of Chang and Eng that have attracted a wide audience.⁴⁹ Kay Hunter’s *Duet* offers an inflection point of popular interest in the late 20th century in “the story of the Original Siamese Twins.” Hunter’s biography is animated by her own personal relationship to the story as she encounters the pictures and letters of her great grandfather Robert Hunter—the Scottish merchant credited with “discovering” the “Siamese Twins.” Irving Wallace and Amy Wallace, who are father and

48 Tromp, *Victorian Freaks*, 8.

49 Kay Hunter, *Duet for a Lifetime: The Story of the Original Siamese Twins*, (New York: Coward-McCann, 1964) and Irving Wallace and Amy Wallace, *The Two*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978). More recently, Yunte Huang’s *New York Times* best seller, *Inseparable: The Original Siamese Twins and Their Rendezvous with American History*, (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2018), offers an updated popular treatment of the lives of Chang and Eng.

daughter it is usually noted, extended the story in their richly detailed biography *The Two*. Wallace and Wallace's biography documents the successful rise of the two brothers from Siam joined at the chest who became internationally recognized and integrated in American social lives after their exhibitions. These popular biographical accounts of Chang and Eng Bunker have been important to popularizing the live narrative of the Original Siamese Twins over various periods of their publication. While Hunter's and the Wallaces' two biographies are both well documented, my approach is distinguished most clearly by the critical perspective I take when analyzing much of the same material. For example, whereas Wallace and Wallace engage much of the reports of the brothers' lives as unvarnished accounts of their feelings and opinions, I engage those materials as mediated expressions that address a range of audiences with a variety of interests and in many situations. Throughout the dissertation I engage generously with these biographies, which helped spur my own interest in the lives of Chang and Eng and the history of the Siamese Twins.

In addition to the popular biographies of the brothers, Cynthia Wu and Joseph Orser have book length academic projects taking up the history of the Siamese Twins in the context of American culture.⁵⁰ I engage closely with both Orser and Wu throughout the project and have benefitted greatly from their insights. Methodologically, my approach splits between Orser's historically grounded account and Wu's transhistorical treatment of Chang and Eng in the 19th century and today. Like Orser, I have limited the scope of my project to the historical period in which Chang and Eng lived and were exhibited (1829-1874). Grounding the project historically provided a way to focus a sustained engagement with the archival materials which I have relied on to ground my sketch of the 19th century cultural context in which the "Siamese Twins" was produced. On the other hand, like Wu, my interest in engaging the history of the lives and

50 Wu, *Chang and Eng Reconnected*, 2012 and Orser, *The Lives of Chang & Eng*, 2014.

exhibitions of Chang and Eng is animated centrally by an intersectional and critical engagement with the ways in which they were both producers *and* productions of culture in the 19th century. Criticism informed by feminist theory, postcolonial studies, critical race theory, and disability scholarship offers ways to critically engage with the many differing investments in the production of the Siamese Twins and what that says about the contexts of their production.

All historiography is rhetorical insofar as critics must make choices about what aspects of a story is to be told and how it offered. Over the course of this project, I made judgments on what portions of the materials I had collected to include in the project, judgments about how to present the materials which had been stripped of their context of production and held in collections sometimes an ocean apart, and judgments about how to attempt to name the absences from the archive. While I enjoined some of the speculative imagination of what the absences from the archive might entail—for example why did Chang and Eng choose to settle in Wilkes County, North Carolina or choose the Bunker surname—I centrally aimed to mark those absences as structuring elements of the narrative to demonstrate the necessarily incomplete perspective that I have brought together here. What follows is neither the lost voices of Chang and Eng nor the true story of their lives, but instead my own labor in reconstructing and analyzing the incomplete archive of mediated representations from which those voices and lives and a history of the 19th century that rarely seems to follow precisely the same trajectory as might be expected.

1.2.1 Rhetorical Historiography

What is rhetorical history? In keeping with David Zarefsky's senses of rhetorical history, this project is both a rhetorical study of history and a historical study of rhetorical practice.⁵¹ I "study [...] historical events from a rhetorical perspective," in that I focus on "how, and how well, people invented and deployed messages in response" to the Chang and Eng lived presence and exhibitions as the Siamese Twins throughout the 19th century.⁵² Articulating the challenges and promises of approaching rhetorical history from a social constructivist perspective, Kathleen Turner describes rhetorical historiography as "guided by and contained in the symbols and systems of symbols that give currency to our attitudes, values, beliefs, and actions."⁵³ Centering the relationships of human symbol use and public life, rhetorical historiography can illuminate the complex and changing ways conjoined twins have been represented and received.

The promotions, exhibitions, and receptions of Chang and Eng as the Siamese Twins provides a case study for scholars to understand 19th century cultural life. Exhibitions as the Siamese Twins provides a space to understand the rise of celebrity personae and modes of public address beyond the predominant study of the speeches of statesmen of the period. Similar to how Angela Ray describes the 19th century lyceum as a "culture-making rhetorical practice" instrumental in the "creation of the idea of a U.S. public," the 19th century exhibitions of Chang and Eng were also a vital rhetorical resource for 19th century American and British public life.⁵⁴

51 David Zarefsky, "Four Senses of Rhetorical History," *Doing Rhetorical History*, ed. Kathleen J. Turner (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996): 19-32.

52 Zarefsky. "Four Senses of Rhetorical History," 30.

53 Kathleen J. Turner, "Rhetorical History as Social Construction: The Challenge and the Promise," in *Doing Rhetorical History: Concepts and Cases*, ed. Kathleen J. Turner, (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1998): 10.

54 Angela G. Ray, *The Lyceum and Public Culture in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2005): 2, 8. Angela Ray's work on the American lyceum in the 19th century United States

Chang and Eng became notable subjects as a proliferation of texts, images, and discussions throughout the period centered on making meaning out of the presence of their staged extraordinary bodies.

Analysis of the representations of Chang and Eng Bunker requires attention to the multiple ways in which corporeal differences were constructed by show promoters, medical professionals, various audiences, and the performers themselves. Lester Olson's articulation of the history intellectual and conceptual resources for visual rhetorical study offers a foundational collection of equipment to examine the lives and representations of Chang and Eng Bunker.⁵⁵ In his studies of rhetorical iconology in the 18th century, Lester Olson models rhetorical examination of the creative engagements by partisans during the production, circulation, and active reception of images both synchronically and diachronically.⁵⁶ Similarly, Cara Finnegan offers rhetorical critics a systematic method of doing rhetorical history by accounting for "the ways in which images become inventional resources in the public sphere" through "production, reproduction, and circulation."⁵⁷ Through a "combination of archival and textual analyses" rhetorical history becomes a "way to

provides an exemplar of the type of rhetorical criticism I am interested in producing. Rather than treating the debates on rhetorical criticism between Michael Leff and Michael McGee as an either/or option, Ray starts from a both/and perspective drawing upon Leff's advocacy of close reading of text and McGee's call for greater cultural and ideological contextualization. In the case of Ray's work, the result is a powerful series of textual cases from which the cultural context of the 19th century and its rhetorical practices are further enriched through rhetorical criticism of the text.

⁵⁵ Lester C. Olson, "Intellectual and Conceptual Resources for Visual Rhetoric: A Re-Examination of Scholarship Since 1950," *The Review of Communication*, 7(1), 2007: 1-20.

⁵⁶ See Lester C. Olson, *Emblems of American Community in the Revolutionary Era: A Study in Rhetorical Iconology*, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991) and Lester C. Olson, *Benjamin Franklin's Vision of American Community: A Study in Rhetorical Iconology*, (University of South Carolina Press, 2004).

⁵⁷ Cara A. Finnegan, "Doing Rhetorical History of the Visual: The Photograph and the Archive," in Charles A. Hill and Marguerite Helmers (eds.) *Defining Visual Rhetorics*, (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004): 198-199. Finnegan's visual rhetorical history "assembles photographic texts, notes from early photographers, and various records of people's reactions to encountering photographs" in order to demonstrate how "viewers were active agents." (Cara Finnegan, *Making Photography Matter: A Viewer's History From the Civil War to the Great Depression*. University of Illinois Press, 2015).

connect issues of production and receptions with the elements within mediated texts.”⁵⁸ Following the lead of rhetorical critics, such as Michael Leff, a close reading of the texts, representations and exhibitions of Chang and Eng Bunker offers a case from which critics may develop a textured sense of the entwining of freak exhibition and cultural life in 19th century public discourse.⁵⁹ What becomes clearer from the practice of situating rhetorical criticism of various archives of materials in the context of their production, circulation, and reception is that historical, theoretical and critical research are mutually informing practices of scholarship.⁶⁰

My approach to rhetorical historiography is informed by a broad array of theoretical and disciplinary approaches and frameworks. Cultural studies attention to the dynamics of entertainment cultures, medical cultures, print cultures, and visual cultures provide contexts from which to understand the performances and understand how those performances also informed cultural formations. Rhetorical and visual rhetorical close readings and theorization of the spectacle, gaze, and celebrity provide conceptual equipment to understand the promotion, exhibition, and consumption of conjoined twins in the 19th century. Conversations in comparative and critical race studies, intersectional feminist theory, sexuality studies, and disability studies by attending to the ways in which differences figure into the changing exhibitions of Chang and Eng.

58 Bernadette Marie Calafell and Kendall Phillips, “Disciplining the Devil: A Rhetorical History of Tod Browning’s *The Devil Doll* (1936),” *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 36(1), 2019: 18-34.

59 Michael C. Leff and Gerald P. Mohrmann. “Lincoln at Cooper Union: A Rhetorical Analysis of the Text.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 60 (1974): 346-358; Michael Leff. “Dimensions of Temporality in Lincoln’s Second Inaugural.” *Communication Reports* 1 (1988): 26-31; Michael C. Leff. “Lincoln at Cooper Union: Neo-Classical Criticism Revisited.” *Western Journal of Communication* 65 (2001): 323-248; see also Barry Brummett, *Techniques of Close Reading* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2010).

60 John M. Murphy, “Barack Obama and Rhetorical History,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 101(1), 2015: 213-224; J. Robert Cox, “Memory, Critical Theory, and the Argument from History,” *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 27(1), 1990: 1-13; Thomas B Farrell, “Rhetoric in History as Theory and Praxis: A Blast From the Past,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 41(4), 2008: 323-336.

The biographical account of Chang's and Eng's life in Siam that I analyze has been produced, reformed, and refracted through a prism of British and American colonial encounters, perspectives and interests. Starting in the memory of Robert Hunter's encounter with Chang and Eng is a way to amplify the colonial conditions that gave way to the invention of the "Siamese Twins." The "Siamese Twins" ought to be understood as an invention of colonial British and American imaginations, even as Chang and Eng had to negotiate and manage—as they did with great authority in many cases—such imaginaries to live their lives. Starting from the colonial context of their "discovery" and "contract" situates the Siamese Twins askew from the presumed success of their lives that characterizes the predominant approaches to the academic study of Chang and Eng Bunker.

1.2.2 Comparative Enfreakment

I draw from work in rhetorical studies, critical/cultural studies, gender and sexuality studies, disability studies, and ethnic and race studies to elaborate a conceptualization of comparative enfreakment that guides my rhetorical historiography for examining the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng. Freak studies—and closely associated companions in monster studies—emerged as a shared matter of concern within American studies and cultural studies. I use the language of "freak" to mark the 19th century staged exhibitions of people who would likely be described as disabled today. Following Rosemarie Garland Thompson, the 19th century display of extraordinary bodies marks a particular conjuncture where the public exhibition of extraordinary bodies becomes reframed within an emergent scientific discourse of social ordering framed from

a position of wonder to one of error.⁶¹ Chang's and Eng's lives, and exhibitions bear the mark of this conjuncture and refract it back as a complex and contested process.

Enfreakment—as an active, changing, and contested set of practices and relations—foregrounds the repetition of ways of knowing, looking, and touching that construct some bodies as freaks. Robert Bogdan's social constructivist framework of the freak figure in the 19th century presentation of human oddities for amusement and profit, centers the rhetorical modes of looking, seeing, and understanding bodily difference. Bogdan traces the social relations of enfreakment along lines of disability, racialization, and gender differences. In doing so, he provides equipment to understand the shifting representations from the exoticized and racialized “Siamese Youths” into the aggrandizing frame of the “Siamese Twins” as young gentlemen within the context of their exhibitions in the emergent popular freak show. Comparative enfreakment is grounded in the interest in both anatomical and racial differences and the corporeal lived experiences of Chang and Eng are staged against shifting racialized settings.

Enfreakment is conceptual equipment for thinking through the rhetorical construction of the freak body alongside a materialist understanding of those raced, gendered, classed, and ableist worlds and relationships. Materialist enfreakment attends to the specific embodiments of enfreaked performers. Garland-Thomson suggests “the most effective way to do this is to keep a steady focus on the materiality of the people who performed as freaks and the particular circumstances of their actual lives.” Conjoined twins navigate singleton society that organizes their bodies at the very limits of the figure of the human.⁶² My rhetorical historiography works from the

61 Garland Thomson, Rosemarie. “Introduction: From Wonder to Error—A Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity.” In *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, edited by Rosemarie Garland Thomson, 1-19. New York: New York University Press, 1996: 1. See also Garland Thomson, Rosemarie. *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

62 Elizabeth Grosz, “Intolerable Ambiguity: Freaks as/at the Limit,” 55-69.

material archive of the lives of Chang and Eng and their various owner-managers to provide a methodology for understanding how their exhibitions as the Siamese Twins play out cultural anxieties in the context of their individual lives as well as national and international politics. Sticking close to the historical materiality of the lives of Chang and Eng, who were staged and performed as the Siamese twins, and the circumstance of their actual lives, offers a materialist grounding point for the challenge of discussing freaks and their display that is committed to unsettling the ways we understand what is freakish about the freak without simply reproducing the oppressive attitudes I critique.

Enfreakment is a companion concept to critical discourses around the grotesque and carnivalesque but refuses to reduce the figuration of the freak into metaphorical otherness—abject or revolutionary. Cynthia Wu suggests critics should take a suspicious view of interpretative strategies “that read metaphors of the prodigious body in ways that are politically recuperative” can ultimately “erase any materialist awareness that there are actual people inhabiting actual environments for whom having this type of body is what justifies their subordination.”⁶³ The politically recuperative interpretative strategy is “yet another way of erasing the subjectivity of people embodied in socially troubling ways by positing them only as rhetorical tools.”⁶⁴ By contrast, I attend to the ways that “they are enfleshed as they are enfreaked.”⁶⁵ Comparative enfreakment is centrally a method to foreground how liberal conceptions of victim/agent fail to fully articulate the dynamics of constraint and inclusion their racialized enfreakment had as they navigated changing cultural formations in the 19th century.

63 Wu, *Chang and Eng Reconnected*, 11.

64 Wu, *Chang and Eng Reconnected*, 11.

65 Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “Freakery Unfurled,” ix-xxii.

Thinking enfreakment *comparatively* is a conceptual practice developed alongside queer of color, Asian American rhetoric, race and ethnic studies, and postcolonial studies. Comparative approaches to understanding rhetoric, race, gender, and sexuality have been generative in pushing forward understanding of the complexity of relationships of power between different bodies, in different places, and in different times.⁶⁶ While there is room for disagreement about what constitutes comparative scholarship, I follow Grace Kyungwong Hong and Roderick A. Ferguson's call to identify and invent analytics to compare racial formations, rather than trace parallel instances of historical similarity across racial groups in the United States.⁶⁷ Comparative racialization complicates nonblack/nonwhite racial categories by positioning Asian presence not as an outlying anomaly of American racial order, but as an integral buffer that enables that bifurcation of the white supremacist racial imaginary to continue. Comparative approaches allow scholars to identify the ways in which African Americans and Asian Americans are pitted against each other in moments of purported white American progress and can also build coalitional links as a mode of colonial resistance.⁶⁸ Chang's and Eng's lives and exhibitions suggest the importance of attending to the complexity and changes of enfreakment of the U.S. racial order. Comparative enfreakment offers a way to understand the dynamic and contingent relationships between Asian immigration, settler colonialism, and black enslavement entangled in the narrative of the Siamese Twins as celebrated figures of American self-made men.

66 Hsuan L. Hsu, *Sitting in Darkness: Mark Twain's Asia and Comparative Racialization*, (New York University Press, 2015), Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity*, 2001, Leslie Bow, *Partly Colored: Asian Americans and Racial Anomaly in the Segregated South*, (2010).

67 Grace Kyungwon Hong and Roderick A. Ferguson, "Introduction," *Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization*, (Duke University Press, 2011, 1-24). Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, (Routledge, 2014).

68 Bill Mullen and Cathryn Watson, *W.E.B. du Bois on Asia: Crossing the World Color Line*, (University Press of Mississippi, 2005); Crystal Anderson, *Beyond the Chinese Connection: Contemporary Afro-Asian Cultural Production* (2013); Helen Jun, *Race for Citizenship: Black Orientalism and Asian Uplift from Pre-Emancipation to Neoliberal America* (2011).

Across their show biographies, Chang's and Eng's family ethnic genealogy shifts. Yunte Huang's settles his narrative choice: "Their father, Ti-eye, was a fisherman from southern China; their mother, Nok, was half Chinese and half Siamese." Huang explains his choice of origin story because of the continuity in reading their signatures on their first contract.⁶⁹ However, the details about their early lives in Siam seem obfuscated from my perspective reading documents almost entirely in English in the context of the creative mediation of their life narrative for the promotion of their exhibitions as "The Siamese Twins." I analyze how these show biographies construct Chang's and Eng's ethnic heritage as sometimes Siamese, sometimes Chinese, and sometimes between Chinese and Siamese. These shifting narratives of ethnic heritage signal the comparative complexity required to study aspects of race and gender in the context of global colonialism.

In the next section, I offer my nominalist choices to refer to Chang and Eng throughout the dissertation as an illustration of the critical, comparative, and materialist commitments that ground my approach historical study of enfreakment. When I am referring to Chang and Eng as subjects I choose to use the naming "Chang and Eng" throughout the project. As a general practice, past and present, it seems appropriate to respect the naming choices that individuals choose for themselves. However, such a general practice is difficult to parse in a historical record in which the potential and capacity for self-representation are thoroughly layered with white voices and perspectives. As a historiographical practice when I am analyzing or referring to a particular artifact I will use the nominalist choices as they are presented in the particular document. While the frequently changing referents to the subjects of the analysis risks making the prose of the project more difficult to follow and potentially more confusing for readers, those difficulties and confusions are productive

⁶⁹ Huang, *Inseparable*, 6 and 35-36. On the risks of critical ambivalence regarding Chang's and Eng's ethnic heritage in reproducing colonial whiteness, see Huang, *Inseparable*, 9-13.

and worth active consideration. Staying close to the myriad of changing naming practices made over the course of the 19th century by a variety of figures keeps in the foreground the mediated reality of historical work. It is a gesture that reminds both the author and readers that the practice of historical recovery is not of the “true” Chang and Eng as much as it is a recovery of the series of representational productions of them over time. There is a value in thinking through the representational practices and potential in inscribing the names of conjoined twins. However, such name games can be a means by which audiences may reduce the conjoined body into an entertainment without much, if any, consideration for the intent and wishes of those lived experiences and practices. The theoretical interest of working through the naming practices of conjoined twins should not displace the recognition of the self-naming choices that conjoined twins employ for themselves.

1.2.3 Names, Pronouns, and Singleton Troubles



Figure 1 "Chang and Eng Bunker, Seated" Portrait Collection (P2), North Carolina Collection Photographic Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina

Chang and Eng have been called by many names. James Hale, who wrote the introductions of the Siamese Twins to the world in his 1829 and 1836 show biographies, writes: "It may be observed that Eng is always on the right, and Chang on the left. Their names are pronounced as if

spelt Chun and In.”⁷⁰ In addition to the anglicized translation of “Chun and In” offered by Hale, the brothers signed their names in various ways. On their 1829 contract with Abel Coffin they signed their names in Cantonese characters.⁷¹ Throughout the 1830s they signed many of their show biographies and portraits either “Chang-Eng” or “Chang Eng.” Hyphenated, Chang-Eng or Eng-Chang, is suggestive of the corporeal connection the brothers shared and Cynthia Wu notes invokes the hyphening of Asian-American.⁷² By 1839, the brothers publicly petitioned to be recognized with the shared surname “Bunker” and referred to as Chang Bunker and Eng Bunker. Despite their shared last name, the brothers simultaneously sought to individuate themselves from each other, Chang and Eng. Visually, the conjunction “and,” highlights nominalist practices to emphasize individuality even as the choice to not represent one figure only also depicts the conjoined nature of individual being. I have chosen to refer to the brothers as Chang and Eng as a general matter when I am not referring to a specific historical use of their names. Still conjoined, “Chang and Eng” signifies most clearly to me the complicated connection of the two individuated selves connected that animates the trouble conjoined twins pose to naming systems that presume autonomous possessive individuals.

Chang’s and Eng’s connection to each other also complicates common pronoun usage in the English language. At a time when attention to the thoughtful use of pronouns that one chooses to identify themselves with has become a valuable norm thanks to the risks and labor of trans and gender queer individuals identifying the ways in which our language replicates an exclusionary sex/gender binary, conjoined twins present a slightly distinct bit of pronoun trouble. When Chang

70 James Hale, *An Historical Account of the Siamese Twin Brothers, from Actual Observations*, New York: Elliot & Palmer, 1831: 4.

71 Huang, *Inseparable*, 32-35.

72 Wu, *Chang and Eng Reconnected*, 103-104.

and Eng are to be referred to in the singular (“he”) or plural (“they”) is not a particularly easy thicket to traverse. Sometimes, it is clearer than others. For example, when Chang is talking to someone in the audience *he* is conversing. However, when Chang and Eng perform a bit of acrobatics *they* are in movement together (although one may follow the other).

The language can get more complicated too. For example, consider the language used to describe the commonplace curiosity with the sexual lives of Chang and Eng who often invite the reader in a sensationalist account with some variation of “Chang and Eng married sisters and fathered 21 children between them!”⁷³ However, this rendering blurs the particular details of Chang’s marriage to Adelaide Yates and Eng’s marriage to Sarah Yates as the “brothers married to sisters” frame invites the incestuous quadrupling to their domestic lives rather than making clear their efforts to form respected monogamous relationships. Similarly, the “21 children between them” obfuscates that Chang and Adelaide were the mother and father of ten children whose aunt and uncle were Sarah and Eng and Sarah and Eng were the mother and father of eleven children whose aunt and uncle were Chang and Adelaide. My labor to be precise is a gesture toward the labor Chang and Eng made to construct the appearance of “normal” family relationships, but the commonplace generalization is importantly suggestive of the complexity of language at play in this case. I imagine there are slips throughout this project that confuse even these seemingly clear examples, traces of the singleton language that I have always known.

73 See, for an example, Larry Getlen, “The fruitful sex lives of the original Siamese twins,” *New York Post*, Nov 1, 2014. This also appears in less sensationalist descriptions. For example, the Wilson Library special collections entry for Chang and Eng Bunker writes: “[In North Carolina] the brothers married two sisters, Adelaide and Sarah Yates of Wilkes County. The sisters were of European ancestry and were neither twins nor connected themselves. The couples were married in 1843 and would ultimately produce 21 children between the two families.” (“Chang and Eng Bunker, The Original Siamese Twins,” No Date. <https://library.unc.edu/wilson/gallery/twins/>)

Trouble representing the brothers as individuals also emerges when considering possessive language. “Chang’s and Eng’s,” for example, represents one of the ways they took collective possession of land, people, and things throughout much of their lives. However, in 1855 the brothers ended their “copartnership.”⁷⁴ Eng paid \$1 to Chang for the ownership of most of the slaves they had jointly owned and in exchange, Eng would receive the deed to more of the land the brothers owned.⁷⁵ The separation of their copartnership is evidence that the ways Chang and Eng conceived of their own sense of individual and collective possession changed over the course of their lives. I have chosen to use “Chang’s and Eng’s” throughout the dissertation to represent the brothers’ individuation and the hegemonic sense of possessive individualism in the 19th century.

Chang and Eng, however, are most frequently identified by none of those appellations but instead variations on their enfreaked staging as the Siamese Twins. In their earliest exhibitions under the paternalistic and maternalistic control of the Abel and Susan Coffin they were staged as the Chinese and then Siamese Youths, highlighting their national origins and age while teasing their corporeal connection. As they got older, they were exhibited as the Siamese Twins and by the time they had come of age they began to qualify that they were the “Siamese Twins, under their own direction.” Returning to the stage in the 1850s, Chang and Eng presented themselves as “Chang and Eng, the Siamese Twins, with their families,” suggesting their individuation and relative masculinities as fathers. By their final exhibitions after the Civil War, Chang and Eng had become the “Original Siamese Twins,” a comparative point of reference for the public’s imagination of conjoined figurations more generally. One of the critical threads of the project is to

74 “Bill of sale for slaves,” 20 November 1855, Chang and Eng Bunker Papers #3761, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

75 See also Orser, *Lives of Chang and Eng*, 123.

chart the changing representations of the Siamese Twins through Chang's and Eng's various staged names of the Siamese Twins in each of the chapters.

Methodological challenges in naming Chang's and Eng's exhibitions as the Siamese Twins raise uneasy questions about the limits of language overdetermined by possessive singleton ideology. Comparative enfreakment provides cultural and critical framework to trace the changing practices of naming the brothers' staged exhibitions over the course of their lives as well as the historical and materialist grounding to navigate the complex and contested relationships between Chang and Eng and others as they sought out space for themselves and asserted their own sense of how they should be referred. In the next section, I turn to the range of archival sources that I explored to ground the rhetorical historiography of the lives of Chang and Eng and make sense of the range of voices involved in the invention of their staged performances as the Siamese Twins.

1.2.4 Curiosity and Curious Archives

The promotion, production, and performances of Chang and Eng Bunker may be gleaned from a variety of primary artifacts. Over the course of this project, I analyze letters written by and about Chang and Eng, promotional materials, medical reports, government and financial records, and popular audiences' reactions, among other sources to provide a constellation of materials from which to understand the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng as the Siamese Twins. Collections of letters written by and to a wide range of audiences have been an incredibly rich resource for attempting to situate the production and circulation of the public representations of the Siamese Twins in the context of intimate relationships. Promotional materials include show biographies, poster broadsides, photographs, newspaper advertisements, and newspaper interviews and represent the largest repository of visual material that center the Siamese Twins. Medical

discourses include reports of examinations and photographs, autopsy reports, and published medical debates about conjoined twins. Government and financial documents include census records and slave schedules, shipping records, contracts, bills of sale, military service records, an incredibly rich ledger of the Siamese Twins expenditures while touring “on their own” and several other items of contextualizing documentation. Audiences’ reactions were found in newspapers, literary reflections, political cartoons, and letters written by audiences that had visited the Siamese Twins. While my primary contribution is the rhetorical treatment of the material from the archives, I insist that archival recovery and arrangement is, in and of itself, a contribution that enriches understanding of 19th century cultural life and the lives of Chang and Eng Bunker.

The historical grounding of the project methodologically required archival research to gather, arrange, and prepare the analysis. A significant portion of the archival material was gathered during an extended research trip to work in the Wilson Library Southern Historical Collection (SHC) at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill and North Carolina State Archives (NCSA) in Raleigh, North Carolina.⁷⁶ In addition to holding a wonderful gathering of material artifacts kept by Chang and Eng and their decedents, these collections bring together intimate family letters and an extensive record of the promotional materials produced and circulated over the course of the many tours of the Siamese Twins. I found a substantial body of primary artifacts to analyze digging through early American and British newspapers, acquiring medical journals from the period, visiting freak and dime show memorabilia storehouses, and

⁷⁶ See Chang and Eng Bunker Papers and Christopher Wren Bunker Papers in the Southern Historical Collection at the Wilson Library at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill and the Siamese Twins Collection and Siamese Twins Papers at the North Carolina States Archives in Raleigh, North Carolina. During this research trip I also the Siamese Twins Exhibit in Mount Airy, North Carolina which is conjoined to the Andy Griffith Museum (Mount Airy was not only the site where the brothers ultimately settled, it is the inspiration for the town of Mayberry from the Andy Griffith Show) and the Mount Airy Museum of Regional History Siamese Twins Collections. I have also made use of the archival material collected in Great Britain, including the Wellcome Library collections and the National Fairground and Circus Archive at the University of Sheffield gathered during a second research trip.

working in the personal ephemera and lasting artifacts.⁷⁷ Grounding my analysis in close readings of an array of primary documents as evidence enables interpretive claims about multiple intersecting discourses and broader cultural contexts.

Some collections were indexed under “Siamese Twins” and others “Chang and Eng,” suggesting an important distinction between the two figurations that is worth holding onto for some analytic purposes. What becomes clearer when reading these collections together is how the two figurations were often inseparable. Chang and Eng—the men—were both producers of the Siamese Twins through their performances and produced by the representations of the Siamese Twins that exceeded their own making. It was a staged persona that was also an important part of their lived lives and how they were recognized internationally, nationally, and locally.

While centering “Chang and Eng” and “Siamese Twins” in my research inquiries, I found that locating archival material sometimes required shifting the subject of my search to foreground their managers, medical examiners, and prominent audiences to identify interesting contextualizing documentation for the project. For example, I make use of the collection of letters between James W. Hale and Susan A. Coffin held in the Clements Library Special Collections at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor to explicate my argument about the gendered and racialized contexts of Chang’s and Eng’s early exhibitions and separation from the Coffins. Similarly, archival exploration of the collections of letters and other documents of prominent white families in Wilkes County and Surrey County, the counties that Chang and Eng settled in North Carolina

⁷⁷ I collected, organized, and reviewed all of the articles from 1829-1875 “Siamese Brothers,” “Siamese Twins” “Chang and Eng” “Chang-Eng” “In and Chun” from three central repositories: Newspapers.com, Early American Newspapers Collection, and British Newspapers. James Hale makes clear the importance of newspapers in 19th century American culture noting the “almost numberless” newspapers in New York City as compared to the “two newspapers” in Amsterdam in the 1836 show biography for the Siamese Twins under their own direction. (see James Hale, *A Few Particulars*, 1836: 11).

in 1839, occasionally refer to Chang and Eng or the Bunkers suggesting the ways in which the brothers had integrated themselves into their local communities, but also offer community context to understand Chang's and Eng's lives.⁷⁸ While these letters occasionally refer to Chang and Eng, they are indexed under another heading that could be missed if we imagine that the production of the Siamese Twins was entirely the labor of Chang and Eng themselves rather than in the context of larger communal and more intimate relationships.⁷⁹ Understanding Chang and Eng and the Siamese Twins in the context of these relationships also serves as a reminder that such archival documentation does not reveal the brothers' "true voice" as much as it reveals the more-than-themselves mediated constructions of their image that they navigated in their everyday lives. Turning the critical gaze back toward the archives of those who managed and visited Chang and Eng offers a method to mark the often seemingly invisible labor and intimate relationships that congeal into the popular imagination of the Siamese Twins.

1.3 Chapter Previews

"Comparative Enfreakment: A Rhetorical History of the Lives and Exhibitions of Chang and Eng Bunker, The Siamese Twins," centers an interest in what histories of the 19th century we

78 See, for example, James Gwyn Papers, Gordon-Hackett Papers, Dobson Family Papers, and Bumpass Family Papers from the Wilson Library, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. See also the Thurmond Chatham Papers, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina for an important set of letters addressed to Dr. Charles Harris.

79 In a separate case of material rediscovery, researchers at the Mutter Museum—which have on exhibit the conjoined livers of Chang and Eng—found among their collections a glass bottle of blood removed from Chang's and Eng's at their autopsy which was catalogued under the name of "Harrison Allen," the doctor who completed the autopsy report. The blood, which appears green, was a medical curiosity at the time that has reoccurred in recent years and may have been the origin of Gene Roddenberry's imagination of the green blood of Vulcan science officer Spock in the *Star Trek* television and film franchises. (Robert Hicks, "Surprising Link Revealed Between Chang and Eng, the Original Siamese Twins, and Star Trek," April 1, 2019.)

can tell when we tell the history of the 19th century through the lives and exhibitions of conjoined twins Chang and Eng Bunker. The thesis for this dissertation can be put succinctly: I argue that Chang's and Eng's lives and exhibitions offer a case study to reconsider scholarly accounts of the politics of curiosity, cultural work of representing social differences, and public techniques of social exclusion and inclusion that worked together to sustain liberal formations of nation, race, gender, sexuality and class grounded in 19th century conceptions of possessive individualism.

Chapter 1, "From Curiosity to Curiosities: The Racialized Colonial Conditions for the Invention of the 'Siamese Twins,'" analyzes materials from the "first contact" between Chang and Eng and British colonial merchant Robert Hunter in 1824 through their "first contract" with American ship captain Abel Coffin in 1829. I introduce the concept "colonial curiosity" to name the conditions and practices of seeing, knowing, and contracting that were the conditions of the first encounter of the "Siamese Twins." I argue that it is valuable to start by situating the invention of the "Siamese Twins" not in the birth story of Chang and Eng, but instead as embedded in changing racialized colonial conditions of early 19th century colonialism, slavery, imperial trade and Western liberalism.

Chapter 2, "Rhetorics of Enfreakment: Practices of Looking and Touching in the Entanglement of Medical and Popular Exhibitions of the 'Siamese Youth,'" examines materials from the earliest exhibitions of Chang and Eng through the major cities of the Northeastern United States (1829). I introduce the concept "rhetoric of enfreakment" to name the oral, visual, and performative dimensions of the staging of the "Siamese Twins" and mark my position that enfreakment refers to a rhetorical and performative practices rather than a fixed ontology. I argue the enfreakment of the Siamese Twins occurs in and between medical and popular discourse

suggesting the emergence of the professional medicine and profitable popular entertainment were entangled at the site of the exhibition and ways of knowing ability, race, and gender.

Chapter 3, “Victorian Enfreakment: Monstrous Intimacies and White Family in the Early European Exhibition of the “Siamese Twins,” examines materials from their first European tour (1829-1831). I argue that it is within the context of Victorian London that a clear representational and performative shift from “exotic to aggrandizing” occurs in the enfreakment of Chang and Eng – the setting shifts from tropical backgrounds to the Victorian parlor, their dress shifts from “traditional clothes” to gentleman’s suits, their interests shift from performing extraordinary acrobatics to playing chess and conversing in English. The “monstrous intimacies” built into the narratives of Abel Coffin as father-manager and Susan Coffin as a mother-manager are an important element of the aggrandizing shift in the narrative as their parental proximity and training has a representational civilizing effect on the staging of the “Siamese Twins.”

Chapter 4, “Their Own Men”: Separation Stories, White Singleton Masculinity, and Racialized Colonial Enfreakment,” examines materials from their return to the United States through their separation from the Coffins and decision to manage their own exhibitions (1831-1833). “Separation stories” offers a useful heuristic through which associations and disassociations with nation, race, gender, and ability can be traced in 19th century America. I situate Chang and Eng as returning arrivants in the tumultuous contexts of Jacksonian America and note the misfitting of the Siamese Twins in their associations and disassociations with American Indians and enslaved black individuals in America. I argue Chang’s and Eng’s performances of recognizable white singleton masculinity – speaking and fighting for themselves – that were cultivated in their aggrandizing enfreakment became equipment for their efforts to disassociate

themselves from racialized colonial capture and highlighted their need to narrate themselves as self-made men.

Chapter 5, “Under their Own Direction”: Self-Made Men, Co-Production, and Rights to the Story,” examines materials from their tours following the break from the Coffins through their decision to retire from public exhibition and settle in North Carolina (1833-1839). I introduce “co-production” as a way to conceive of the construction of the narrative of the Siamese Twins, Under their own direction” in Chang’s and Eng’s tours in throughout the United States, Europe, Cuba, and Russia in the mid to late 1830s. The copyright dispute between James Hale and Abel Coffin over the rights to produce and sell the original show biography, *An Historical Account*, offers an interesting starting point to consider the question of who owns the rights to profit from the production of one’s story. Reading the subsequent revisions to the narrative in the 1836 publication, *A Few Particulars*, reimagines the brothers’ early lives as laboring men and a moment in which a comparative curiosity emerges from the brothers’ looking back at the curious staring publics they encountered on their travels. I conclude with a comparative analysis of the 1836 images of the “Siamese Brothers” with an 1839 lithograph of “Eng-Chang” to suggest the performance of dress, style, and setting all gesture toward the adoption of an “American style” that they had cultivated in their performances and they would take as they settled into North Carolina.

Chapter 6, “Asymptotic Inclusions: Citizenship, Marriage, and Slavery in Chang and Eng Bunker’s North Carolina Settlement and exhibitions of the Siamese Twins with their Children,” examines material from their settlement into North Carolina through their deaths (1839-1874). I offer “asymptotic inclusions” as a way of figuring the social dynamic of ever approximating, but never quite achieved inclusion and exclusions that Chang and Eng faced as retired conjoined twins from Siam. In 1839, Chang and Eng adopted the surname “Bunker,” and in the same year they

became American citizens when such a right was legally limited to “free white persons” by the 1790 Naturalization Act, in 1843 they married white sisters when state and national prohibitions on interracial marriage and miscegenation was the law, and as a gift from their father-in-law on their marriage day would become part of the local slaveholding elite of the American South. Chang’s and Eng’s emergence into the American slave owning settler society in North Carolina not only confounds legal expectations, but it is also suggestive of a comparative racialization that enables Chang and Eng to move toward whiteness through a series of masculine performances. “The Bunkers” became a growing family and the costs of supporting that growing family became their exigency to return to the stage. The “Siamese Twin, with their children” tours in 1849, 1853, and 1860 attempted to extend the aggrandizing frame into their domestic lives as husbands and father, but the cultural contexts of their exhibitions were changing as well. In the context of changing immigration dynamics and emergence of nativist anti-Chinese sentiment, the brothers’ exhibitions seem to serve as a barometer of rising anti-Chinese sentiment and nativism. By the time they returned to North Carolina from California in 1861, the Civil War was imminent. While Chang’s and Eng’s corporeal connection was a prominent visual metaphor for the debates over union of the nation, it was also increasingly disassociated and disembodied from Chang and Eng as the *Siamese* twins. The costs to the Bunkers, both in terms of their sons fighting and financially, pushed the Bunkers back on tour In the Northern United States (1866) and Europe (1869) where anti-Asian sentiment and disassociation of slaveholding and whiteness converged in a hostile reception. Eng’s stroke and the subsequent death of the brothers and the medical grab for their corpses for a final staged exhibition in the *Autopsy of the Siamese Twins* closes the project.

The concluding chapter draws together the guiding research questions and gestures toward tentative conclusions. Bringing together the cases, and in particular the rhetorical techniques of

comparison that enabled managers, medicine men, audiences, and consumers to make meaning from the exhibitions of Chang and Eng, I draw attention to the rhetorical situations and actions that made entertainment spectacle and medical standardization predominant features of American and English culture in the 19th century. My aim to demonstrate how the stories of, and around, the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng are intimately entwined with the stories of the industrialization of entertainment and professionalization of medicine in the 19th century and to suggest what can be learned by such entanglements. Specifically, my intention is to illuminate what close historical and rhetorical study of the exhibitions and lives of Chang and Eng reveal about the contested and changing representations, discourses, and performances of ability, race, gender, class, and age in the United States and England throughout the 19th century. This may reveal some of the details and practices by which the lives of Chang and Eng were entangled with changing standards of human normalization and how they each negotiated, contested, and complicated such changing standards.

2.0 Chapter 1 From Curiosity to Curiosities: The Racialized Colonial Conditions for the Invention of the “Siamese Twins”

It was in 1824 that [Robert Hunter] first caught sight of Chang and Eng ... One evening Hunter was returning home across the river when he thought he saw a strange animal swimming some distance away. He could make out what looked like four arms and four legs, surmounted by two heads, all moving through the water in perfect co-ordination. Dusk was beginning to blanket the river, and Hunter found it difficult to see exactly what was going on, but then the strange water creature clambered up on to a small boat, and Hunter realized that he was looking at two small boys, naked from the waist upwards, and very thin. He also noticed with incredulity that these two boys were joined together at the chest.⁸⁰

Robert Hunter, as the story has often been told, is the Scottish merchant credited with first “discovering” the “Siamese Twins.” In the epigraph that begins this chapter Kay Hunter provides a vivid account of the first encounter between her great grandfather, Robert Hunter, and the brothers who would become the most recognized Asian figures throughout America and Europe in the 19th century. Hunter’s discovery, like so many other colonial discoveries, is a case of mistaken identification. From Hunter’s unmarked viewing position Chang and Eng emerge first as animal and then as boys. Hunter’s gaze, filtered by an ideological “dusk,” is first attracted by the “strange water creature,” and only after “some time watching them from a distance,” does Hunter realize what he has truly discovered. Looking upon the “half-naked” bodies of the twins swimming, the narrative of Hunter’s “discovery” is grounded in a set of colonial assumptions about the authority of European men to gratify their curiosity in looking at, and rendering judgments about, the bodies of colonial others.

80 Kay Hunter, *Duet for a Lifetime: The Story of the Original Siamese Twins*, (New York: Coward-McCann, 1964): 26.

It is possible that Hunter never actually saw the twins in 1824 and that the story was an embellished fabrication to amplify Hunter's role in the rising phenomenon.⁸¹ Regardless, the narrative of Robert Hunter's "discovery" and its many repetitions, highlight many of the entangled rhetorical knots that run throughout the narrative of the "Siamese Twins" that were invented alongside the exhibitions of Chang and Eng. The story of Robert Hunter's first contact with Chang and Eng is a reminder that the "Siamese Twins" emerges from a particular set of dynamics that I characterize as colonial curiosity: an attraction to the strange, dusky ways of looking, and power-laden modes of coming to recognize, know, and possess others' bodies.

My argument is that Hunter's "discovery" of the "Siamese Twins" is a product of the colonial conditions of Hunter's encounter with Chang and Eng coupled with rhetoric of curiosity that rationalized the commodified exhibitions of Chang and Eng throughout the United States and Europe. Robert Hunter's "discovery" of the "Siamese Twins" has generally been divorced from the history of British colonial empire, but a closer examination of the story opens up additional ways of conceiving of the complicated practices of colonial imperialism. In this chapter, I offer a rhetorical history of the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng Bunker from their first colonial contact with Scottish merchant Robert Hunter in 1824 through their first colonial contract with American ship captain Abel Coffin and arrival in the Boston harbor in 1829. I argue colonial curiosity converges with liberal discourses of free trade and notions of individual self-possession that give way to racialized and ableist commodification.

81 The earliest published account of the Hunter "discovery" narrative I have found is from the renowned London physician George Buckley Bolton's "Statement on the Principal Circumstances Respecting the United Siamese Twins Now Exhibiting in London" delivered to the Royal College of Surgeons in the earliest months of Chang's and Eng's tour through Europe in 1830 (George Buckley Bolton, "Statement on the Principal Circumstances Respecting the United Siamese Twins Now Exhibiting in London," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, 120, (1830):177).

Joining scholars, such as Lisa Lowe, who have begun to unpack and entangle the histories of European liberalism, settler colonialism, antiblack slavery, I situate Hunter within a particularly Scottish colonial patronage network in Southeast Asia. Sent to Bangkok by influential Scottish colonial administrator John Crawfurd, Robert Hunter acted an intermediary colonial actor and “gentlemanly companion” for British and American merchants in Siam throughout the 1820s and 1830s. Understanding Hunter as an intermediary colonial actor place him within a network of figures traversing the Siamese waters in search of trade and adventure. From within this framework, it is possible to also understand the easy movement between the curiosity that animated the scene of Hunter’s “discovery” and the subsequent effort to turn the encounter into a profit-making venture.

Kay Hunter generously suggests as much in her description of the turn from curiosity to commodification.

The uses of Chang and Eng as a commercial enterprise may have occurred to Hunter shortly after meeting them. Although his first move to make friends with them was no doubt prompted by sheer curiosity, it is impossible to say at what stage their potentialities as money-makers entered his head.⁸²

Regardless of when Hunter first imagined the commodified potential of exhibiting the “Siamese Twins,” it was five years after his initial “discovery” that the first contract was signed between Chang and Eng and American ship captain Abel Coffin that set into motion the ocean journey that led to the invention of the Siamese Twins. Perhaps more than Robert Hunter’s “discovery” in 1824, it is Abel Coffin’s contract with Chang and Eng in 1829 that set in motion the eventual production of the “Siamese Twins” as the most spectacular display of conjoined twins. Hunter’s colonial curiosity converges with liberal discourses of free trade and racialized and ableist notions of

⁸² Hunter, *Duet for a Lifetime*, 28.

commodification as he acts as a witness to the contract between American ship captain Abel Coffin and Chang and Eng and takes up a partial “ownership” in a venture to exhibit the “Siamese Twins” as “curiosities.”

Investigation of the obscured convergence between European liberalism, settler colonialism in the Americas, the transatlantic African slave trade, and the expansion of the East Indies and China trades in the late 18th and early 19th centuries offers context for understanding the contracting of Chang and Eng by Robert Hunter and Abel Coffin as an event commensurate with the changing dynamics of British empire. Lisa Lowe suggests the turn of the 19th century brought about important conjunctural changes in British racialized colonialism that centered Chinese labor within a liberal free trade discourse to redress challenges to earlier models of colonial domination.

The Chinese were instrumentally used in this political discourse as a figure, a fantasy of “free” yet racialized and coerced labor, at a time when the possession of body, work, life, and death was foreclosed to the enslaved and the indentured alike. In other words, in 1807, the category of “freedom” was central to the development of what we could call a modern racial governmentality in which a political, economic, and social hierarchy ranging from “free” to “unfree” was deployed in the management of the diverse labors of metropolitan and colonized peoples; this racial governmentality managed and divided through the liberal myth of inclusive freedom that simultaneously disavowed settler appropriation and symbolized freedom as the introduction of free labor and the abolition of slavery. In 1807, as Britain moved from mercantilist plantation production toward an expanded international trade in diversified manufactured goods, the Chinese “coolie” appears in colonial and parliamentary papers as a figure introducing this alleged transition from slavery to freedom.⁸³

Situating the contracting of Chang and Eng within the emergence of a changing racial colonial model that draws upon “free” Asian labor as a means of dividing and substituting African slave labor helps to explain the constraints they faced. Understanding the changes of racialized colonialism with attention to the role of curiosity and disability also adds a layer of complexity to

83 Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 24.

the trend Lowe charts. Colonial curiosity converges with liberal discourses of free trade and notions of individual self-possession that give way to racialized and ableist commodification.

The contract between Abel Coffin and Chang and Eng is the earliest document to establish a connection between Chang and Eng and other European and American figures. Reading the formal rhetorical frame of the signed contract alongside private letters Abel Coffin wrote to his wife at sea during trip from Bangkok to Boston reveals the entangled role of curiosity, commodification, race, and ability in explicit terms. Coffin's letter makes clear that the formal language of "free labor" quickly slips into "ownership" and "profit" within an already established market logic for "curiosities," both objects and people conceived of as objects. After months traversing the Indian and Atlantic Oceans, Coffin, Hunter, Tiene, and Chang and Eng arrived in the port of Boston. Upon arriving in the port Coffin submitted a passenger list that reveals an additional layer of colonial curiosity by what it conceals: Chang's and Eng's presence on board. While this chapter starts in the story of Robert Hunter's open gaze upon the bodies of Chang and Eng I conclude by thinking through colonial curiosity as a capacity to conceal and control some bodies presence in public and frame their presence for a publics gaze.

2.1 Colonial Curiosity: George Finlayson and the Naturalist Companion to Colonial

Liberalism

In 1821 the Governor-General of British Colonial India, Lord Hastings, sent an envoy led by colonial administrator John Crawfurd to the Kingdom of Siam (Thailand) and Cochin China (Vietnam) in an effort to introduce liberal ideals of free trade, rule of law and private property throughout Southeast Asia. The "Crawfurd Mission," as it came to be popularly known,

represented the first effort to secure a formal agreement between the Colonial British government and the Kingdom of Siam in the 19th century. Crawford was joined by, among others, his wife, officers of the British Indian Army, and naturalist George Finlayson who served as the medical officer for the envoy. The mission lasted for two years, as the envoy traveled through the Malay Peninsula stopping along British colonial establishments and meeting with the King of Siam and Cochin China in an effort to establish favorable trading relations between the nations. Given that Crawford was unable to secure a formal trade agreement with either the Kingdom of Siam or the government in Cochin China the mission was generally regarded as a failure.

As influential as Crawford's account of the mission was in influencing official discourse and policy making, George Finlayson's account has been under explored and offers a distinct rationale and perspective that adds a layered complexity to the understanding of the colonial mission. In explaining the rationale for publishing a second account of the mission, Finlayson suggested Crawford's "opinion of things differ[s] considerably" from his own.⁸⁴ The preface to the publication of Finlayson's account is not framed as an "account of the official proceedings or conduct of the Mission," which is conceded to be Crawford's rightful purview, but instead "its object is to throw light on the country, and on the character, institutions, and habits of the people generally."⁸⁵ Finlayson characterizes himself as "but a mere spectator" and his role in the mission as "unconnected with political and commercial matters."⁸⁶ Finlayson's role as medical officer and background as a naturalist provides a specific perspective and ethos to his account not captured in Crawford's official political and economic frame.

84 Finlayson, *The Mission to Siam*, xviii. Finlayson died at sea on the return of the envoy back to India. Stamford Raffles published his journals posthumously in 1826 and the prefacing materials include Raffles' rationale and letters from Finlayson about the prospects of publishing his journals after the mission before he passed away.

85 Finlayson, *The Mission to Siam*, viii.

86 Finlayson, *The Mission to Siam*, 192.

Finlayson's training as a naturalist and an advocate for scientific exploration is animated by this emergent Enlightenment curiosity. Finlayson, for example, characterizes curiosity in essentialist and determinist terms, circumventing discussion of the potential harm in the colonial effort to gratify its driving force. He suggests that even if Man's "peace" and "happiness" may have been greater if he "indulged these propensities less" that "it is not in his power to resist the unalterable impulse, conferred upon him, doubtless, for the best of purposes."⁸⁷ Turning curiosity inward, and asserting its inevitability, Finlayson rationalizes the goodness of the gratification of such curious impulses given that such an "ever-active, never satisfied" drive was bestowed, presumably by a higher power and evidenced in the natural order, upon man. "Insatiable ambition, boundless curiosity, are to be reckoned among the more prominent of the attributes with which man is endowed," Finlayson writes.

An important aspect of Finlayson's sketch of curiosity is that it is a drive toward a particular object, the foreign, and, by the 19th century was conceived as boundless.

In a greater or less degree, there is, perhaps, inherent in the minds of most men, a desire to visit foreign countries – desire which neither storms nor tempests, deserts, wilds, nor precipices, with all their appalling fears, have been able to counteract or to check. ... even the great globe itself no longer seems to offer a theatre too great or too extensive for the exertion of his activity.⁸⁸

Finlayson suggests that this intrinsic attribute of curiosity drives the colonial reach the entire world over and that no natural or man-made force could possibly contain it. Finlayson's curiosity has as its object "foreign nations" and "new and distant countries," imagined as container spaces of "various objects of knowledge" passively waiting for the "inquiring" to "discover" in it organizing

⁸⁷ Finlayson, *The Mission to Siam*, xxv.

⁸⁸ Finlayson, *The Mission to Siam*, xxiv.

natural laws. For Finlayson, the “foreign” is assumed to exist as an object to be known by the properly “curious.”

Empiricist inquiry grounded in a methodological assertion of objectivity and privileging individual observation also brought about a “democratization” of curiosity as a cultural good among the British public. Barbara Benedict, tracing curiosity in early modern English inquiry (1660-1820), argues “curiosity, newly legitimized as empiricism, swept to the center of culture just as England struggled to restore traditional order after the interregnum.”⁸⁹ Finlayson similarly drew lines between the empiricist method of scientific inquiry and curiosity. Finlayson writes of curiosity in terms of desire and gratification, tying together the practices of colonial discovery and pleasure.

The curiosity that is gratified with inquiring into the laws implanted in organized beings, or into the general phenomena which characterize the [xxv] material world at large, admits of, and is usually attended by gratification as permanent as it is unmixed; every step is attended with unalloyed pleasure, every new acquisition leads and stimulates to further discovery.⁹⁰

Curiosity is satiated, Finlayson suggests, only in the unending process of discovery. It is revealing that the gratification of colonial curiosity by way of discovery is tied to “power” and its uneven distribution. As Finlayson writes, “no one capable of reflection but has at one time or other experienced this laudable curiosity, and wished for the power to gratify it” even as he acknowledges that it is “the lot of few to indulge their inclinations this way.”⁹¹ For Finlayson, and within a particular scientific methodological frame, curiosity and discovery have no end point –

89 Barbara M. Benedict, *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001): 27.

⁹⁰ Finlayson, *The Mission to Siam*, xxvi.

⁹¹ Finlayson, *The Mission to Siam*, xxvi.

the pleasure of discovery begets only more discoveries suggesting that the gratification of colonial pleasure is in fact its ultimate purpose.

Finlayson's account of curiosity is a significant resource for understanding racialized colonialism and a refutation of commonplace scholarly assertions that the 19th century marks a decline in of the role curiosity played in European elite culture that emerged alongside the Enlightenment. For example, in their foundational study of the wonder, curiosity, and European conceptualizations of the Order of Nature, Lorraine Datson and Katharine Park cite the middle of the 18th century as a "sharp rupture" in the role curiosity played in popular and elite European cultures that had arisen since the twelfth century.⁹² Finlayson's suggestion that curiosity is the rationale for his participation in the "Crawfurd Mission" suggests the narrative of the decline of curiosity has been overstated. As the medical officer for the envoy and trained naturalist, Finlayson's curiosity also offers a case in which curiosity is thoroughly embedded into official colonial missions most often publicly rationalized for its political and economic objectives. Against the idea that curiosity becomes circumscribed to "popular culture" in the 19th century, Finlayson's journals suggest curiosity continued to circulate and animate the actions of colonial actors that resist easy confinement to an elite/popular or high/low cultural formulation.

92 Lorraine Datson and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature: 1150-1750*, (MIT Press, 1998), 19. The 19th century curiosity decline narrative is also reflected in other prominent scholarly treatment of curiosity. See, for example, Barbara M. Benedict, *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Justin Stagl, *A History of Curiosity: The Theory of Travel, 1550-1800*, (Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995); Susan Scott Parrish, *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

2.2 Situating Robert Hunter's "Discovery" in 19th Century Racialized Colonialism and Gentlemanly Capitalist Networks

According to Kay Hunter's family genealogy the Hunter clan come from Renfrewshire, Scotland. Robert Hunter's family had "became very wealthy" by joining other Glasgow merchants in the expansion of tobacco trade from colonial Virginia to France.⁹³ Thomas Devine argues that these "Glasgow Tobacco Lords," as they came to be known, had nearly monopolized tobacco imports by the middle of the 18th century and were instrumental in the expansion of the slave trade into the deeper woods of Virginia up until the American Revolution.⁹⁴ After the colonial revolution in the United States, the Hunter family had their commercial back pushed back to Scotland and they set up a family business in Neilston, a small village near Glasgow.⁹⁵ The Hunter's invested the wealth they had accumulated on the exploitation of the anti-black slave tobacco exchange into the production of varied manufactured goods, in particular linens and glassware.

Robert Hunter took up a role in the family business expanding into emerging colonial markets in Southeast Asia. Kay Hunter suggests that Robert Hunter "was typical of the Westerner who had adopted the East; he had money, he had power, and was thus inclined to throw his weight about, but he was without that bluff *bonhomie* so peculiar to the Englishman abroad. Instead, he had the studied reserve of the Scot, unless he was roused, when a quick temper and infuriating arrogance betrayed him."⁹⁶ Hunter is a "typical" colonial figure, he recognized his shared sense of identity with fellow "Westerner" and a position of power over the passively adopted "East." And

93 Kay Hunter, *Duet for a Lifetime*, 25.

94 T.M. Devine, *Scotland's Empire: The Origins of the Global Diaspora*, (Penguin Books, 2003). See Chapter 4, "Trade and Profit," 69-93.

95 Hunter, *Duet for a Lifetime*, 26

96 Hunter, *Duet For a Lifetime*, 26.

yet, Hunter's colonial masculinity is a particularly Scottish variant. Hunter's Scottish masculinity was more authentic than the colonial Englishman.⁹⁷ Hunter is steady, but explosive, letting his emotion and pride to undo a particular sense of Englishman masculine rationalism.

2.2.1 Robert Hunter: Colonial Intermediary Actor

On August 13th, 1824 John Crawfurd, positioned now as the resident of Singapore, wrote a letter to the Chao-Phrayah Prah Klang Chao-Khun-Kosa in Siam announcing the imminent arrival of "Mr. Hunter" along with a stock of "cannon, muskets and ammunition" and an appeal for the government of Siam to coordinate military action with the British colonial armed forces in their war against the neighboring Burmese Kingdom.⁹⁸ As a colonial historian-administrator, journalist and professional lobbyist, and one of the key racial theorists of the British Empire, John Crawfurd was a central figure in British colonial policy in Southeast Asia in the 19th century. According to Gareth Knapman, unlike colonial administrators such as Stamford Raffles who drew upon a universal idea of history and argued that colonial occupation played a critical role in civilizing the region from barbarism, Crawfurd argued for indigenous sources of civilization throughout South-East Asia that were influenced in minimal ways by colonial occupation.⁹⁹ Alongside other Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, Crawfurd identified a contradiction between the liberal idea of "freedom" and European imperial settlement. Despite Crawfurd's criticisms of

97 Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The "Manly Englishman" and the "Effeminate Bengali" in the Late Nineteenth Century*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

98 John Crawfurd, "The Letter of J. Crawfurd, Esqre., Resident of Singapore, to his Excellency the Chao-Phrayah Prah Klang Chao-Khun-Kosa," August 13, 1824, in *The Crawfurd Papers: A Collection of Official Records relating to the Mission of Dr. John Crawfurd sent to Siam by the Government of India in the year 1821*, p. 200.

99 Gareth Knapman, *Race and British Colonialism in South-East Asia, 1770-1870: John Crawfurd and the Politics of Equality*, (New York: Routledge, 2017).

Empire his policy proposals were for reforms to the East India Company and not abolition. Rather than a broad policy of settler colonial expansion, Crawford argued for the establishment of a colonial “intermediate class” to mediate between “European traders” and “native traders” to achieve “fair and free trade” throughout Southeast Asia.¹⁰⁰

Hunter is an exemplar of Crawford’s policy of limited British imperial colonialism in Southeast Asia in which an “intermediate colonial class” facilitated secure and convenient “free trade” and mediated between the “European trader” and “native trader.”¹⁰¹ Acting as an intermediary, Hunter fulfilled Crawford’s racialized informal colonial scheme without requiring an official British expansion of imperial settlements and dictation of local governance. Kay Hunter suggests that “as a businessman Robert Hunter was shrewd and hard-headed” but “as a person he was socially adaptable, with a persuasive tongue and the useful ability of ‘getting in’ with the right people.”¹⁰² Shortly after his arrival in Bangkok with Crawford’s letter of introduction and supply of weapons, Hunter made use of his “persuasive tongue” and sought authority from the King of Siam to start the construction of home on the shores of Bangkok. “[A]fter a great deal of difficulty and persuasion,” Hunter was the first British citizen granted permission to build on the banks in Bangkok.¹⁰³

A year after arriving in Bangkok, Robert Hunter married Tan Puying Sap whose parents were part of the early intermixing of Portuguese and Siamese families that have had a legacy in

100 Knapman, *Race and British Colonialism in South-East Asia*, 40. While Knapman does not address the relationship between John Crawford and Robert Hunter, Robert Hunter exemplifies Crawford’s policy of limited colonialism acting as an “intermediate class” in Siam facilitating “free trade” between the European merchants and the Bangkok court.

101 On Crawford’s policy of colonial reform in Southeast Asian and the establishment of an “intermediate class” to facilitate free trade see chapter 1 and chapter 2 in Knapman, *Race and British Colonialism in South-East Asia, 1770-1970*, 2017.

102 Hunter, *Duet for a Lifetime*, 26.

103 Fred Arthur Neale, *Narrative of a residence at the capital of the kingdom of Siam; with a description of the manners, customs, and laws of the modern Siamese*, (London: Office of the National illustrated library, 1852): 53.

the making of Bangkok.¹⁰⁴ In marrying Sap, Hunter found himself enmeshed at the center of the Portuguese community in the Santa Cruz settlement of Bangkok. Hunter's marriage to Sap offered another point of access to an established networked of influence in the Bangkok court.¹⁰⁵ Hunter and Sap's marriage and three children would continue to play an outsized role in British-Siam economic and government exchange throughout most of the 19th century. Hunter's marriage offers an early case that complements Tamara Loos's argument the British establishment of legal regulations as part of the trade liberalization measures of the 1855 Bowring Treaty represent an important aspect of British colonial entanglement of Siam in the 19th century that set the context for Hunter's "discovery" of the Siamese Twins.¹⁰⁶

104 Edward Van Roy, *Siamese Melting Pot: Ethnic Minorities in the Making of Bangkok*, (ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2017): 63-64.

105 Sap rarely figures prominently in biographical accounts of Hunter, an omission reflective of British patriarchal representations of women as wives of husbands rather than autonomous figures – and one that I risk replicating here. When Sap is referenced it is usually with regard to her beauty and impact on fashion. In fact, Angelina Sap, as she became referred to after her marriage, became an icon of white femininity in Siam. While Terweil found that European "clothing habits" were generally met with "derision" by the Royal court in Siam throughout the 1830s, and only adopted in preparation for the Bowring treaty in the 1850s, Sap is a transitional figure in the adoption of European dress as a sign of status. Between the 1830s and 1850s, Sap was described by European travelers and missionaries as a "beauty, extremely fair, with eyes like Queen Victoria" and a Catholic Bishop produced a portrait of Sap which was "used as being the fairest type" of a "Siamese lady." Her style of dress, or costume, represented a blend of Siamese and European customs and was recognized by Europeans as a marker of her status. "She dressed grandly and was considered to be the most fashionable person of her day. On great occasions her silk panung was converted into a skirt, and she wore big silk pahoms (black or pale yellow)." Reading along the grain of the colonial accounts of Hunter in Siam, Angelina Sap is constrained by the patriarchal framing of women as wives and reduces her to her image and yet it should not be forgotten that British women also played an important role in carrying out the operations of colonialism.

106 Tamara Lynn Loos, *Subject Siam: Family, law, and colonial modernity in Thailand*, (Cornell University Press, 2006).

2.2.2 Adventures of the British Factory in Siam: Gentlemanly Capitalism and

Entertainment at Hunter's Home

Hunter's home would become a central hub for travelers, merchants, and missionaries moving through Siamese waters in the first half of the 19th century. European merchants referred Hunter's home as the "British Factory." Richard Moore notes that the designation "British Factory" was technically "a misnomer ... inasmuch as it was not under the control of the British Government, as the other factories were, of their respective governments."¹⁰⁷ The colloquial misnomer is revealing, as the designation of Hunter's home as the "British Factory" reflects a slip between his official capacities as a British colonial agent and an individual free trading merchant. Neither officially a consulate nor a manufacturing base for the colonial government in India, Hunter still was the central figure responsible for introducing merchants and incoming government officials with the royal court in Bangkok and arranging the first commercial agreement between Siam and Britain in 1826.¹⁰⁸ Arriving with weapons in hand, securing Siamese lands as his own private property, and arranging commercial and political exchange are recognizable mechanisms of 19th century colonial empire. However, Hunter's development of formal and informal networks of intimacies in Bangkok suggests colonialism ought not be thought of within a circumscribed political and economic framework. Missing from the understanding of this layered intermediary colonial actor figure is the place of curiosity and entertainment at sea that was a critical obligation

107 R. Adey Moore, "An Early British Merchant in Bangkok," in *Journal of the Siam Society* XI (1914-1915): 21.

108 On the role Hunter played as an essential intermediary between the British and Siamese governments see the Burney Papers: Robert Burney, *Papers Relating to Captain H. Burney's Mission to Siam in 1825*. Vol. 2, Part 4, (Bangkok: Vajirañāṇa National Library, 1910): 36-37 and 45.

that Hunter undertook beyond providing introductions and safe harbor for merchants, missionaries, and travelers.

Hunter's home was a central site for meals and amusement for those Europeans and Americans traveling through the area. References to Hunter in 19th century adventure and travel literature about Siam highlight the role he played in facilitating entertainment for the curious adventurer ranging from George Winsor Earl's *Voyages and Adventures in the Indian Archipelago*, who characterizes Hunter as "a most agreeable companion," to prominent adventure publisher Fred Arthur Neale, who dedicated a significant portion of his *Narrative of a Residence at the Capital of the Kingdom of Siam* to telling stories of "Hunter's adventures."¹⁰⁹ Neale describes Hunter as "a gentleman ... who had the esteem and regard of all the better portion of the inhabitants at Bangkok" and a "prince of hospitality."¹¹⁰ As an intermediary colonial actor, Hunter is also an exemplar of what Cain and Hopkins have described as a "gentlemanly capitalist," a male elite who promoted and served colonial interests beyond the "official mind" of the British nation or the "bourgeoisie" class that never precisely took hold of the levers of power in Europe.¹¹¹ Extending Cain and Hopkins intersectional look at colonialism as a gendered phenomenon, Hunter's service in the foundation of the civilizing mission of British Empire included the entertainment of his fellow gentlemanly capitalists.

It is difficult to pinpoint when Robert Hunter first began to develop a relationship with Able Coffin. By 1829, Abel Coffin had established himself as one of the most efficient American

109 George Winsor Earl, *The Eastern Seas or Voyages and Adventures in the Indian Archipelago 1832, 1833, 1834*, (London, 1837) and Fred Arthur Neale, *Narrative of a residence at the capital of the kingdom of Siam; with a description of the manners, customs, and laws of the modern Siamese*, (London. Office of the National illustrated library, 1852.)

110 Neale, *Narrative of a Residence*: 16, 32.

111 P.J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: 1688-2015*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016).

ship captains to trade in China and throughout Southeast Asia. Coffin carried out least three different trips from the United States to China between 1820 and 1830, each time completing the voyage in a shorter period and with increasing commercial success. Part of Coffin's route included stops in Siam, and it was likely that his commercial trade was in part facilitated by Robert Hunter acting as an intermediary between the royal court in Bangkok and Coffin himself.

2.3 From Colonial Curiosity to Commodified Curiosities: Introducing Abel Coffin

2.3.1 Contracting Chang and Eng

We the undersigned Chang & Eng agree, bind
& engage ourselves, with our own free will & consent,
(also that we have the free will & consent of our Parents &
the King of our country), to go with Capt^l Abel Coffin
to America and Europe and remain with them
whenever he chooses, until the expiration of
the time agreed upon between Capt^l Coffin &
the Gov^t of our country, and that he according to
promise will return us to our Parents & friends any
time within 5 years, and that Capt^l Coffin
will allow us, from his profits ten Spanish
P Month, and pay all our expenses, and
nothing is to be deducted for the money
allowed our Mother sister in Bangkok
first day of April one Thousand Eight Hundred twenty nine
見魯因洛呂我大政
At H. request of Capt^l Coffin I have translated the
above to the King's. By King our fully satisfied
with the contents. Bangkok 1st April 1829
R. H. Hamilton
Gov^t of Siam

Figure 2 Contract between Chang and Eng and Abel Coffin, April 1, 1829

On April 1st, 1829, Abel Coffin and Chang and Eng signed a contract in Bangkok that set into motion the invention of the “Siamese Twins.”

We the undersigned Chang [and] Eng agree [illegible] [and] engage ourselves, with our own free will [and] consent (also that we have the free will [and] consent of our parents

and the King of our country) to go with [Captain] Abel Coffin to America and Europe and remain with him wherever he chooses; until the expiration of the time agreed upon between [Captain] Coffin and the [Government] of our country, and that he [according] to promise will return us to our parents [and] friends any time within five (5) years and that [Captain] Coffin will allow us from his profits ten Spanish P'Month and pay all our expenses and nothing is to be deducted from the money allowed our mother dated in Bangkok first day of [April] one Thousand Eight Hundred twenty nine.¹¹²

From a liberal economic perspective, the contract between Abel Coffin and Chang and Eng may be seen as documentary evidence of the agency the twins had in their early exhibitions. After all, Chang and Eng purportedly signed the contract under their own “free will and consent.” The rhetoric of Chang’s and Eng’s “free will and consent” to labor reflects the liberal political discourse of “possessive individualism” that shaped European and American conceptualizations of freedom, rights, obligation and justice.¹¹³ C.B. Macpherson defines possessive individualism as “the conception of the individual as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them.”¹¹⁴ From this perspective liberal politics is grounded in a notion of individualism defined by the capacity to freely enter into laboring contracts and gives priority to rhetoric of “self-ownership” in social relations.¹¹⁵

The terms of the contract are exploitative. Under the terms of the contract Chang and Eng are to “go with” and “remain with” Abel Coffin “wherever he chooses” and yet the contract does not say anything about exhibitions, private or public, which Chang and Eng would be responsible for carrying out under Coffin’s management. The language of the contract is precisely vague as it makes clear a relationship of servitude between Chang and Eng and Abel Coffin while leaving the

112 Contract between Chang and Eng and Abel Coffin, April 1, 1829, Surry County Historical Society, North Carolina.

113 C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

114 Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, 3.

115 Torrey Shanks, "The Rhetoric of Self-Ownership," *Political Theory*, 47(3), 2018: 311-337.

labor required of Chang and Eng unclear. The terms of the profit and payment structure also incentivize an exploitative dynamic because Coffin's profits and Chang's and Eng's living expenses are figured in a zero sum relationship. Given that Coffin is to pay for all of Chang's and Eng's living expenses out of his profits, and that those expenses are left undefined, the terms of the contract incentivize and enable Coffin to pay out a bare minimum to support Chang's and Eng's quality of living to maximize his profits.

Contextualizing and reading the contract reveals more than merely the exploitative conditions that set in motion the production of the "Siamese Twins," it can also be read as a document of the social scene in which it was produced as well as offer clues about the practices of translation that undergirded the earliest engagements between those in Siam and the British and American merchants. The contract is the only document that includes Chang's and Eng's signature written in a non-English script.¹¹⁶ The contract involved more than Chang and Eng and Abel Coffin. In addition to securing an agreement between themselves, they also had to secure the "free will and consent" of their parents and the King of Siam. The government of Siam and Abel Coffin set the length of the agreement at 5 years, perhaps reflecting the authority of the King to oversee commercial exchange between those in Siam and beyond its borders. Chang's and Eng's mother was also involved in the contract, not only offering consent for her children to travel with Abel Coffin but she was also to be paid an unnamed flat sum, presumably to support her and their family while Chang and Eng were away. Finally, two witnesses also signed the contract, the Scottish intermediary actor Robert Hunter and a young Siamese man Tiene who traveled alongside the

¹¹⁶ From this Yunte Huang has offered an unraveling translation of how the Anglicized name "Chang and Eng" came to be. Yunte Huang argues that "all of these etymological speculation, colorful and plausible as they may sound, fail to consider the simple fact that the twins were ethnically Chinese. The family spoke a Chinese dialect at home and also wrote in Chinese. Hence it is reasonable to suggest that the origin of their names ought to be found in the Chinese language, not Siamese" (Huang, *Inseparable*, 8-9).

group as a servant and translator for Chang and Eng and the English speaking populations they would encounter. Populating not only the contract between Chang and Eng and Abel Coffin, Hunter and Tiene, the King of Siam and their mother, would be important figures in the early exhibitions of the “Siamese Twins.”

2.3.2 Imagined Profitable Curiosities

“Susan I have two Chinese Boys 17 years old grown together. They enjoy extraordinary health. I hope these will prove profitable as a curiosity. ... Mr. Hunter is passenger with me [and] is an excellent companion. He owns half of the Chinese Boys.”¹¹⁷ These few sentences written by the American ship captain Abel Coffin in a letter addressed to his “dear wife” Susan somewhere near the island of St. Helena in the Atlantic Ocean aboard the *Sachem* on June 28th, 1829, represent the first introduction of Chang and Eng to any audience in the United States. Abel Coffin’s letter is one of many he would write to his wife as he was traveling the oceans trading his way through East Asia, Europe and his homeport in Boston. In many ways it was like other letters he had written to his dear wife. He wrote of devout commitment to religion, his love of their family, and the emotional tolls of life at sea. However, the letter also reveals the early invention of “The Original Siamese Twins” that would have a significant impact not only on the lives of Chang and Eng and the Coffin family, but also on an array of American and European audiences over the course of the 19th century. Closer attention to the language the Coffin is instructive as a maneuver to slow down

¹¹⁷ Letter from Abel Coffin to Susan Coffin, June 28, 1829, (James W. Hale and Susan A. Coffin Papers, William L. Clements Library, The University of Michigan).

what contemporary readers may expect to know about “Chang and Eng Bunker, the Original Siamese Twins.”

Coffin sets up a complementary relationship between himself and Robert Hunter in which they are gentlemanly companions a theme that resembles much of the discourse surrounding Hunter’s role as an intermediary colonial actor. It is notable not only because of the homosocial relationships that Coffin cultivated on the Oceans with other men, but also for the way it contrasts with his relationship description with Chang and Eng. Coffin uses the language of “ownership” of Chang and Eng, evoking the specter of slavery at the outset of their travels across the Atlantic and setting up one of the central controversies that would follow the two throughout their early lives and exhibitions. Perhaps the phrase should read that he owns half of the promotional production of “the Chinese Boys,” as an investment in the show rather than in their being.

It may not have been remarkable for Abel Coffin to mention to his “dear wife” the “Chinese Boys 17 years old” unless they had “grown together.” It was that Chang and Eng had “grown together” that Abel Coffin was able to imagine and “hope” for a paying audience, or a “profitable” market, for exhibiting the twins as “curiosities.” It is unclear what Abel Coffin’s role in trafficking people across the Oceans in his trading efforts is, but at least one other Siamese male – Tiene – was on the ship alongside Chang and Eng as they made their way to the Boston harbor. Coffin’s omission of Tiene is instructive as his role as a “servant” is rendered unexceptional and the exploitation of his labor is made mundane in comparison to the inventive capacities he imagined in the “extraordinary bodies” of the “Siamese Twins.”¹¹⁸

118 Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*, (Columbia University Press, 1997).

It is also notable that Abel Coffin refers to Chang and Eng as “two Chinese Boys,” as they were reportedly called in their home in Siam, and not as “Siamese Twins” as he would later present them on American and European stages. Somewhere across the Atlantic the twins shifted from Chinese to Siamese as Able Coffin considered how to go about presenting Chang and Eng to the public.¹¹⁹ American and European interest in the ethnic and racial heritage of the Siamese Twins, and its assumed consequences, was a persistent theme throughout their lives among many audiences.¹²⁰ Their lives and exhibitions are the center of the most extensive discursive productions of public anxiety around the “Chinese” and “Siamese” and an effort to establish confidently how Chang and Eng fit into such a racialized schematic. Greta Ai-Yu Niu suggests the assumptions behind the question of the proper ethnic labeling of Chang and Eng is grounded in a notion of racial authenticity that obfuscates racial border crossings.¹²¹ I would add that it begs the question as to why Coffin thought there may be an advantage to shifting from “Chinese” to “Siamese” in his inventive exhibition practices and what distinctions he meant to potentially evoke that I take up in the next chapter. Regardless, Chang’s and Eng’s relationship to Siam, China, and Asia are imbricated in these Orientalist discourses they navigated throughout their lives in America.

Coffin refers to Chang and Eng as not only Chinese, but as “Boys 17 years old.” On one hand to refer to Chang and Eng as “boys” is an established Orientalist trope of racialized Asian

119 The Atlantic Ocean also figures as the site of transitioning Africans into a racialized register of blackness in the transatlantic slave trade. While the trafficking of Chinese “coolie” laborers is interlinked with the enslavement of Africans the convergence of the Atlantic Ocean as a space of racialization is also suggested in this case.

120 Orser notes that “‘Sinification’ of the twins,” is a central focus for many scholars, including Robert Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture*, (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1999); Tchen, *New York Before Chinatown*, 1999; Orser, *The Lives*, 210.

121 Greta Ai-Yu Niu, “People of the Pagus: Orientalized Bodies and Migration in an Asian Pacific Rim,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1998): 32-36.

childishness.¹²² To evoke the “boyiness” of Chang and Eng is to also bring them into a larger ideal of racial progress, development, and stagnated masculine development into manhood.¹²³ Recognizing the Chang and Eng as “Boys,” because they are “17 years old,” is also to triangulate their gendered lives within European paternalistic legal codes. In a scene of monstrous intimacy, Abel Coffin took a role as a “benevolent patriarch” taking paternal authority for the twin “boys” at the time he wrote his letter to Susan Coffin in 1829.¹²⁴ However, less than four years later the twins would evoke the same age rationale for their autonomy from Coffin’s authority as 21 year old men and set out on their own exhibitions “under their own direction.”

Taken together these few lines abstracted from a letter sent from Abel Coffin to his wife from the Atlantic Ocean provide insight into some of the raced, gendered, and ableist dynamics that shaped the early lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng in the United States and Europe. Within the context of his romantic familiar Victorian domestic scene of exchange with his wife, Coffin brings Chang and Eng into the register of early Jacksonian America and its hegemonic ways of knowing others’ bodies.

122 Shek, Yen Ling, “Asian American Masculinity: A Review of the Literature,” *Journal of Men’s Studies*, Fall 2006, 14(3), 379-391.

123 David L. Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America*, (Duke University Press, 2001).

124 Christina Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

2.4 Concealed Arrivants

388.

LIST OF PASSENGERS.

REPORT and LIST of the PASSENGERS taken on board the Ship Sachem of Boston.
whereof *A. Coffin* is Master, burthen *396* tons and $\frac{1}{2}$ ths of a ton, bound from the Port
of *Siam* for *Boston*

NAME.	AGE.	SEX.	Occupation, Trade or Profession.	Country to which they are usually sailing.	Country of which they intend to become inhabitants.	Remarks relative to any illness they may have had or otherwise till the vessel leaving the voyage.
<i>Rob. Hunter</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Merchant</i>	<i>Scotland</i>	<i>Scotland</i>	
<i>Tiene</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Servant</i>	<i>Siam</i>	<i>Siam</i>	

Figure 3 Abel Coffin, *Sachem* Passenger List, August 17, 1829

The *Sachem* arrived in the Boston port on August 17th, 1829. Upon arrival Abel Coffin submitted a report of the cargo and passengers aboard.¹²⁵ He listed only two passengers taken on board. First, Coffin's "excellent companion" Robert Hunter is listed as a 26-year-old male merchant from Scotland. The second listed passenger is Tiene, the witness to the contract between Chang and Eng and Abel Coffin, who Coffin records as a 17-year-old male "servant" from Siam. Tiene served as a Coffin's translator and companion to Chang and Eng on their earliest American and European tours. If Chang and Eng are understood as exceptional figures of early Asian experiences in America, attention to the representations of Tiene can illuminate another layer of

125 Abel Coffin, Passenger List of *Sachem*, August 17, 1829. Original data: Boston, Massachusetts. *Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at Boston, Massachusetts, 1891-1943*. Micropublication T843. RG085. 454 rolls. National Archives, Washington, D.C. Retrieved from Online database Ancestry.com Operations, Inc, 2006.

Siamese experience in America. Recognized as a Siamese servant Tiene's racialized occupation figures as an early exemplar of the growing trafficking of Asian people by British colonial agents and American merchants in the "coolie" trade that rose alongside concerns over securing black enslavement throughout the 19th century.

Able Coffin's reported list of passengers of the *Sachem* is instructive as much for its omissions as its inclusions. Notably, Coffin omitted Chang and Eng from the passenger list. The omission functions as an erasure of recognition of Chang and Eng as "passengers," a rhetorical absence of their presence on board the *Sachem*. Boston passenger reports not only announce the arrival of an individual moving through the oceans it is accompanied by a litany of information that function as vital identifying markers for political recognition in Jacksonian America. Being recognized as a passenger comes along with having a name, age, sex, occupation, a country to which one belongs, and an announcement of the country they intend to become inhabitants. Being recognized as a passenger is also to be understood as a figuration entangled with a host of identities, practices, and performances of mobile ways of life in early 19th century.¹²⁶ While passengers are not all equal, precisely because of the additional vital information recorded under such a heading and as indicated by the distinctions marked between Hunter and Tiene, the absence of recognition is an altogether distinct rhetorical position.

Concealing Chang and Eng from the public would become a staple in the production of the exhibitions of the "Siamese Twins" as the absenting of their bodies excited a flurry of speculative interest among an emerging audience. Coffin not only omitted Chang and Eng from the Boston port passenger list record, helping to develop a routine procedure in the 19th century exhibitions of

126 Peter Adey, David Bissell, Derek McCormack and Peter Merriman, "Profiling the passenger: mobilities, identities, embodiments," *Cultural Geographies*, Vol 19, No 2 (April 2012), pp. 169-193.

conjoined twins, Coffin reportedly hid the twins under a blanket as they made their way to a hotel outside of the public gaze as he began to arrange for their exhibition throughout the northeast of the United States. In concealing the twins from the potentially paying public Coffin achieved a double objective, drawing up public interest and speculative imagination while not giving away any free views of the Siamese Twins. In fact, before the public would be offered an opportunity to pay to gaze at the twins Coffin arranged to have a private medical examination by leading figures at Harvard Medical School. Medical men at Harvard jumped at the chance to examine the twins and offered Coffin an aura of credible authority in exhibiting the twins as truly remarkable curiosities. Whereas the earliest “discovery” of the Siamese Twins in 1824 may begin in a memory of a colonial Scottish intermediary navigating the Meklong river and openly gazing upon their half-naked bodies, the earliest “production” of the exhibitions of the Siamese Twins in the United States begins in strategic concealment. The next chapter works through the earliest exhibitions of Chang and Eng as the “Siamese Twins” throughout the United States and then Europe before returning back to the United States for a second tour and ultimately their decision to “exhibit under their own direction.” Reading along the grain of the early inventions of the “Original Siamese Twins” the next chapter makes apparent how curiosity and curiosities moved across oceanic networks to produce knowledge about foreign others for an array of audiences.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter offers a fragmentary intervention into the story of the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng that starts from the scene of Hunter’s “discovery” grounded in colonial curiosity and ends in the commodification of curiosities in the contracting of Chang and Eng. Starting a

rhetorical history of the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng from an unpacking of the colonial conditions that gave way to the invention of the “Siamese Twins” provides a methodological and historical reframing of the “success story” narrative by centering the ways in the extent to which Chang’s and Eng’s lives were made livable were already conditioned by national, racial, gendered, and ableist constraints.

Most often mentioned briefly as the man who “discovered” the “Siamese Twins,” Robert Hunter in a broader story of British colonial imperialism in Southeast Asia. Joining scholars, such as Lisa Lowe, who have begun to unpack and entangle the histories of European liberalism, settler colonialism, antiblack slavery, I situate Hunter within a particularly Scottish colonial trajectory, embedded in a Scottish patronage network in Southeast Asia in the wake of the 1807 Abolition Act and an emergent strain of Scottish Orientalism. Sent to Bangkok by influential Scottish colonial administrator John Crawford, Robert Hunter acted an intermediary colonial actor and “gentlemanly companion” in Siam throughout the 1820s and 1830s. Calling into question the exceptional thesis that Siam represents an excluded case in British Southeast Asian colonialism, Robert Hunter facilitated colonial exchange between British officials, merchants, and missionaries decades before the 1855 Bowring Treaty that has most often served as a mark of British colonial influence in Siam.

Arguing that Robert Hunter is a colonial actor opens up the archive of actors responsible for doing the work of 19th century Southeast Asian colonialism and extends the notion of colonialism beyond the formal interaction of nations to a shifting network of actors, practices, and ways of engaging others. As much as military, economic and political factors pushed British colonial empire, the journals of George Finlayson and Hunter’s story of “discovery” are suggestive of the ways in which *curiosity* was a driving force of colonial encounters. While much of the study

of the history of curiosity is bound by a periodization from the 16th to 18th centuries, this chapter reads Finlayson's journals, Hunter's "discovery," and the role that Hunter played in entraining curious travelers as indicative of the ways in which curiosity remained an essential driving force in colonial thought and practice. Hunter's role as an intermediary colonial entertainer served as a training ground for his subsequent effort to manage the display of Chang and Eng as the "Siamese Twins" throughout the United States and Europe in the early 1830s.

Hunter's colonial curiosity converges with liberal discourses of free trade and racialized and ableist notions of commodification as he acts as a witness to the contract between American ship captain Abel Coffin and Chang and Eng and takes up a partial "ownership" in a venture to exhibit the "Siamese Twins" as "curiosities." I do not mean to put the matter of commodification too gently in this chapter. Raising the connection between commodification of Chang and Eng as curiosities, treating them as a potentially profitable object is a practice of dehumanization. While the dehumanization is perhaps rhetorically softened by positioning Chang and Eng as the Coffins' children, the commodification at the scene of this familial construction demonstrates how the construction of the white family may include elements of dehumanization.

Hunter's relationship with Coffin is suggestive of the ways in which American Orientalist markets converged with the Scottish free trade and British colonial roles in the Indian Ocean. Aboard the *Sachem*, Hunter, Coffin, and Chang and Eng moved through the Indian Ocean and across the Atlantic as the imagined exhibitions as the "Siamese Twins" began to take more concrete shape. In the next chapter I take up the various roles of curiosity in the next decade of the lives and exhibitions of the "Siamese Twins" from the various positions of the managing exhibitors, medical professionals, and popular public lookers and the ways in which Chang and Eng navigated and reworked those discourses of curiosity.

While study of curiosity has often been bound by a periodization from the 16th to 18th centuries, often implicitly suggesting that the early 19th century marks a peculiar decline in the discourse of curiosity, a closer examination of a colonial archive in Southeast Asia indicates that curiosity remained an important animating feature of European thought and practice. This chapter opens up the historical study of curiosity not only temporally, but also by shifting from inter-Atlantic Oceanic exchange to the Indian Ocean and thinking about curiosity in movement across Oceans. Expanding the archive of curious knowledge producers beyond the European metropole and colonial agents, reading along the grain of the early inventions of the “Original Siamese Twins” makes apparent how curiosity, curiosities, and the curious moved across oceanic networks to produce knowledge about foreign others for an array of audiences. In the next chapter I take up the various roles of curiosity in the next decade of the lives and exhibitions of the “Siamese Twins” from the various positions of the managing exhibitors, medical professionals, and popular public lookers and the ways in which Chang and Eng navigated and reworked those discourses of curiosity.

3.0 Chapter 2 Rhetorics of Enfreakment: Practices of Looking and Touching in the Entanglement of Medical and Popular Exhibitions of the “Siamese Youth”

From the concealment of the Boston ports, Abel Coffin swept Chang and Eng away to his home in Newburyport, Massachusetts where they were introduced to his wife, Susan Coffin, and their children Abel and Susan, among other local friends. In addition to those familial introductions, Abel Coffin arranged for the very first paid public exhibitions of the twins for a general audience. On September 4th, 1829 the *Newburyport Herald* announced that the “Double Siamese Boys about 18 years old (lately arrived in ship *Sachem* Capt. A. Coffin) the most valuable and extraordinary natural curiosity ever before presented the Public will be exhibited in Washington Hall, Green Street, on Monday & Tuesday next only.”¹²⁷ Setting the price of admission at 25 cents, and half that price for children under the age of 12, Coffin began his – and the twins’ – foray into the public amusement’s profession. Enfreaked as a “natural curiosity” for his hometown crowd, setting into motion the public exhibition of what would become one of the most significant stage performances of the 19th century by presenting Chang and Eng as the “Double Siamese Boys.”

From August to October of 1829 Chang and Eng were exhibited for medical men and the general public throughout the northeastern states of America. In this chapter I focus closely on these early exhibitions because they significantly shaped the rhetorical frames and controversies that attended the public displays of Chang and Eng over the course of the next decade of their

127 “Curiosae Naturae,” *Newburyport Herald*, September 4, 1829. Printed in John J. Currier, *History of Newburyport, Mass. 1764-1905*, (1906): 158-159.

lives. This chapter examines the entanglement of medical and entertainment rhetorics framing the earliest exhibitions of Chang and Eng in the United States. Specifically, this chapter draws upon professional medical publications, newspaper advertisements and responses, unpublished personal letters, and promotional materials in order to explicate a rhetorical history of the early lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng in the United States from September through October of 1829.

In late August, Chang and Eng, joined by Tien, the young Siamese male who had signed as witness to the original contract and had been brought along as a “servant,” and led by Abel Coffin, began by traveling from the Coffin residence in Newburyport to Boston for their first touring exhibitions. However, before being staged for the general Boston public, Chang and Eng were first examined by medical professionals at the Harvard Medical School. Among the medical men examining Chang and Eng was professor of Anatomy and Surgery John Collins Warren, whose “Account” was published for both professional medical audiences and circulated among the general public, blending the rhetoric of medicine with entertainment. Warren’s “Account” was the most prominent early framing of Chang’s and Eng’s exhibitions, he classified Chang and Eng within a system of teratology as “the most remarkable case of this *lusus naturae*” given “the perfection and distinctness of their organization” and “the length of time they have lived,” and he tied those interests to phrenological race sciences of the period.¹²⁸

From Boston the group stopped in Providence, Rhode Island for a short period before they made their way to New York City. In Providence, Chang’s and Eng’s exhibitions displaced a public showing of gallery paintings, raising questions about the boundaries of high and low cultural exhibitions. In New York, the twins were again examined by men from the New York medical society before being put on stage for the general public. While in New York, prominent medical

128 Warren, “An Account,” 255.

men of the city Samuel Mitchill and Felix Pascalis, engaged in a public, and subsequently international, debate centering the question of the capacity and appropriateness of surgically separating Chang and Eng from each other.¹²⁹

Before turning their sights to England, the troupe added a stop in Philadelphia where Chang and Eng continued to be significant draws for curiosity seekers and became metaphorical fodder for Pennsylvania elections and embroiled in a legal controversy that highlighted the troubling of social and political norms grounded on the assumption of possessive individualism. As their first stint of touring in the United States came to a close by October the group made their way back to New York where they were joined by Susan Coffin as they prepared to make their way across the Atlantic aboard the *Robert Edwards* for their first tour in Europe. This chapter unpacks the rhetorical twists and turns that followed these earliest exhibitions to understand how medical men and general audiences engaged similarly and differently with the display of Chang's and Eng's extraordinary bodies as the "Siamese Youths."

In sketching a rhetorical history of the early exhibitions of Chang and Eng I make the following arguments. First, the early exhibitions of Chang and Eng in the United States were entangled the convergences of the professionalization of medicine and the growing emergence of popular entertainment networks throughout the Northeast of the United States. On one hand, medical men engaged in homosocial theatrical examinations of Chang and Eng and circulated their findings in national and international professional journals.¹³⁰ On another hand, those medical men became prominent voices in promoting the authenticity – and value – of the public exhibitions of

¹²⁹ Samuel L. Mitchill and William Anderson, "The Siamese Boys," *New York Spectator*, September 29, 1829; Felix Pascalis, "The Siamese Boys—HomoDuplex," *Mourning Courier and New York Enquirer*, October 3, 1829; "The Siamese and Sir Astley," *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, February 9, 1830.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

Chang and Eng by offering a way of seeing as well as scientific cover for the purported social discomfort of paying to gaze upon such extraordinary bodies. Even so, members of the public frequently posed Chang and Eng as a limit case for the authority of medical men's production of knowledge and generated a public discourse that often exceeded the circumscribed perspectives of medical men by drawing attention to the metaphysical troubles conjoined twins posed to a society grounded in singleton assumptions, the social and legal assumption of autonomous individualism.¹³¹

Second, the rhetoric of enfreakment of the early exhibitions of Chang and Eng drew upon ableist singleton ideologies, racialized orientalism, and hegemonic Jacksonian ideals of masculinity. Medical men framed Chang and Eng within a uniting scientization of teratology and phrenological racialization and a paternalistic sense of infantilization that not only circulated among medical men but was offered to the general public as a framework for understanding Chang's and Eng's presence. While much of the general public recirculated such claims, others asserted an orientalist imaginary of a distant Siam that was intrinsically suited for producing such monstrous figures and engaged in speculative debate about how to properly classify the racial status of the twins. In both situations, those of the medical professionals and the general public, the representations of Chang's and Eng's family and companion, Tiene, contributed to the sense of a coherent Siam and its differences from an unmarked American sense of individual worth.

Third, the rhetoric of enfreakment of the early exhibitions of Chang and Eng involved verbal, written, visual, and performative elements. In particular, understanding of the rhetoric of

131 I borrow the term "singleton" from Alice Dreger. Dreger coined the term "singleton" to name the unmarked social center of autonomous individualism in many societies. Dreger is building from the conceptual praxis of Rosemarie Garland-Thomas who uses the term "normate" to recenter the unmarked category as the object being examined and not simply the "disabled." In using the term "singleton" my aim is highlight the social frameworks that make conjoined twins appear different.

enfreakment as centrally a verbal and visual phenomenon needs to be supplemented by an understanding of the importance of touch and performance in order to have a fuller grasp of the complexities of the rhetorical situations of the exhibitions of Chang and Eng. Moreover, a close reading of the responses to Chang and Eng and their performances by various audiences calls into question any easy understanding of Chang and Eng within a neat victim/agent dichotomy. In addition to unpacking some of the rhetorical characteristics of the medical and popular gaze and touch, I draw out the examples of Chang's and Eng's socially constrained capacities to look and touch back.

In the next section I turn my attention to a close reading of John Collins Warren's "Account of the Siamese Youths" published in *The American Journal of Medical Sciences*. As the first national professional medical publication accounting for the exhibition of Chang and Eng, "Warren's Account" offers a valuable entry point into considering the role of scientization of teratology in the early professionalization of medicine in the United States. I further suggest reading "Warren's Account" offers an exemplar of the entanglement of teratology and orientalist phrenology and weave a reading of the specter of slavery invoked and circulated by Warren, and challenged in later letters dictated by Chang and Eng.

Having set out some of the fundamental problems of disability and race in Warren's medical framework, I then focus my attention on the techniques of enfreakment, specifically notions of the medical gaze and examination touch, that can be extrapolated from "Warren's Account." I conclude this section on medical enfreakment by sketching three perspectives on the feasibility and appropriateness of surgical separation of Chang and Eng from each other that became an early and persistent international controversy in the medical discourses of conjoined twins. Highlighting the interlinkages between ways of looking and touching, a close reading of the

early 19th century surgical frameworks provides a rejoinder to the assumption that “corrective surgery” to normalize conjoined twins by rendering them corporeally individual is the only appropriate view of conjoinment.

Following my close readings of “Warren’s Account,” I assess the circulation of an excerpted letter written by Warren for the promotion of the exhibitions of the “Siamese Youths” in order to begin to sketch some of the linkages between medical professionalization and profitable popular exhibitions of extraordinary bodies. While Warren’s medical frame is used as a popular advertisement device, various audiences’ responses to Chang’s and Eng’s exhibition from Providence to Philadelphia indicate a rhetoric of enfreakment in excess of a strict medical or scientific framing. In the final section of the chapter, I unpack these various public responses to the exhibitions of Chang and Eng. I first look at the resistance to the exhibition of Chang and Eng in Rhode Island, considering the cultural stratification of looking, or the “paying gaze,” in public spaces. While some resistance to Chang’s and Eng’s public exhibitions circulated the majority of published audience responses highlighted the confounding experience of witnessing extraordinary bodies that troubled normative ideas of the natural and metaphysical order. I then offer a reading of rhetoric of enfreakment of a popularly circulating article in the *Galaxy* that draws upon orientalist and singleton presumptions, but at the same time refuses the assertion of absolute authority of medical men to explain the presence of conjoined twins. In concluding this section, I contrast the sense of Chang and Eng “looking back” as a matter of upending simple logical assertions with the legal controversies that accompanies Chang’s and Eng’s efforts to “touch back” those audience members that attempted to perform amateur examinations of their conjoinment. However, to understand these dynamics it is critical to understand the broad rhetorical situation for the rhetorics of enfreakment.

3.1 Professionalization of Medicine and Scientization of Teratology in 19th Century U.S.

A rhetorical history of Chang's and Eng's earliest exhibitions is also a history of the entangled stories of medical professionalization and the rise of enfreaked entertainment in early 19th century United States. Prior to exhibiting the "Siamese Youth" to the paying Boston public, Abel Coffin arranged for Chang and Eng to be privately exhibited for "medical men" in prominent centers of medical professionalization in urban centers in the early 19th century, including Boston, New York, and Philadelphia.¹³² Medical men saw in Chang's and Eng's body opportunities to add to the professional classification of a natural order anatomical norms by constructing their deviation from such natural orders and, in doing so, establishing themselves as unique contributors to human knowledge. Building from Freak Studies scholars who have identified the 19th century as a critical conjuncture in the discourse of extraordinary bodies within a scientific frame that render their being erroneous rather than wonderful, this moment was enabled by the aspiration to professionalize medicine in the United States in order to secure a sense of authority of speaking about others' bodies in this period.

The early 19th century was an important moment in the development of medical professionalization and competition in the United States. Medical men began to organize scientific institutions, published medical and scientific journals, and stake a claim a to the advancement of scientific knowledge nationally and internationally.¹³³ In the United States, Philadelphia became a

132 I follow Alice Dreger's in using the term "medical men" in recognition of the sexed exclusion of women from the early processes of medical professionalization in the United States.

133 On the emergence of medical professionalization in the United States see: George E. Gifford, Jr. "Medicine and Natural History—Crosscurrents in Philadelphia in the Nineteenth Century," *Transactions & Studies of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia*, 4, 45 (1978), 139-149; Courtney R. Hall, *A Scientist of the Early American Republic, Samuel Latham Mitchill, 1764-1831*, (New York, 1934); John C. Greene, "The Boston Medical Community and Emerging Science, 1780-1820," in *Medicine in Colonial Massachusetts 1620-1820*, (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1980), 187-199.

leading site for the production of medical knowledge in the country at the turn of the 19th century, establishing a professional medical community by constructing a medical school, publishing a medical journal, and forming several medical societies.¹³⁴ New York, with the leadership of Samuel Latham Mitchill, emerged as a competitor to Philadelphia as a national center for the professional training of students in medicine and related scientific subjects with the establishment of the College of Physicians and Surgeons in 1807 and the publication of the *Medical Repository*, the first general scientific journal produced in the nation.¹³⁵ By the time Chang and Eng arrived in the United States, Boston had become another prominent site and competitive hub in the American production of medical knowledge and professionalization. With the leadership of John Collins Warren, and the shift of the Harvard Medical School from Cambridge to Boston, an emphasis on public lectures and demonstrations for physicians, and the publication of the regional *New England Journal of Medicine and Surgery*, Boston in the 1820s would become the site of many medical firsts in the country.¹³⁶ Among those “medical firsts” was the examination of Chang and Eng at the Harvard Medical School.

John Collins Warren, professor of Anatomy and Surgery at the Harvard Medical College, was the first American medical professional to publish his examination of Chang and Eng. Warren, who is frequently remembered as the first American surgeon to use anesthesia in surgery, committed himself to the development of a professional community of medicine and science in Boston.¹³⁷ In 1820, Warren delivered a lecture series on comparative anatomy for the

134 George E. Gifford, Jr. “Medicine and Natural History—Crosscurrents in Philadelphia in the Nineteenth Century,” *Transactions & Studies of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia*, 4, 45 (1978), 139-149.

135 Courtney R. Hall, *A Scientist of the Early American Republic, Samuel Latham Mitchill, 1764-1831*, (New York, 1934).

136 John C. Greene, “The Boston Medical Community and Emerging Science, 1780-1820,” in *Medicine in Colonial Massachusetts 1620-1820*, (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1980), 187-199.

137 Francis D. Moore, “John Collins Warren and his act of Conscience: A Brief Narrative of the Trial and Triumph of a Great Surgeon,” *Annals of Surgery* 229 (2), (1999): 187.

Massachusetts Medical Society, which was later published as *Comparative View of the Sensorial and Nervous Systems in Men and Animals*, the first American treatise ever published on the topic.¹³⁸ Over the course of his tenure Warren cultivated and curated an extraordinary teaching collection of anatomical and pathological specimen that became the foundational artifacts of the Warren Anatomical Museum. Nearly a decade after his first treatise on comparative anatomy, Warren added his examination of Chang and Eng to his accumulation and refinement of his understanding of comparative anatomy and medicine.

Shifts in the professionalization of medicine over the course of the 19th century had a demonstrable impact on the medical rhetorical framing of extraordinary bodies and further fed the professionalization efforts of medical men. It has been suggested that teratology, the study of monsters, or, in a more contemporary medicalized valence the study of abnormal anatomy and physiology has an ancient antecedent. For example, Dudley Wilson claims that teratology can be traced back to at least the work of Aristotle, who he describes as “in many ways the founder of the science of teratology,” and his efforts to set out classifications of the natural world.¹³⁹ Even so, efforts to classify and arrange those bodies within a schematized understanding of a natural order blossomed among renaissance interest in monstrosities and romantic depictions of the wonders of the natural world. However, it is the 19th century figure Etienne Geoffroy St. Hilaire, a French zoologist interested in anatomy and experimental embryology, is often centered in histories of the establishment of teratology as a branch of scientific study.¹⁴⁰ Within the 19th century moment of

138 John Collins Warren, *A Comparative View of the Sensorial and Nervous Systems in Men and Animals*, (Boston, 1822).

139 Dudley Butler Wilson, *Signs and Portents: Monstrous births from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment*, (Taylor & Francis, 1993).

140 Hilaire’s work on chicken eggs and conjoined twins supports a theory of epigenesis and laid the groundwork for teratology as birth defects became scientifically understood as errors in developmental processes due to external influences rather than signs of demonic intervention.

professionalizing medicine, American medical men sought out extraordinary curiosities in order to cultivate knowledge at the boundaries, frontiers, or “limits” of thoughts about a natural order generally, and human bodies particularly.¹⁴¹

Approaches to the description, classification, and explanations of the persistent presence of extraordinary bodies took on a particular scientized and medicalized frame in the early 19th century. Rosemarie Garland Thomson’s genealogy of freak discourse identifies scientization of the 19th century as a critical conjuncture in freak discourse that demarcates a shift in modernity and its attending perspectives on knowing and talking about bodies. She argues:

As modernity develops in Western culture, freak discourse logs the change: the prodigious monster transforms into the pathological terata; what was once sought after as revelation becomes pursued as entertainment; what aroused awe now inspires horror; what was taken as a portent shifts to a site of progress. In brief, wonder becomes error.¹⁴²

While Thomson’s genealogy suggests a decline of wonder and the freak show given the medicalization of the extraordinary body over the long 19th century, this project attempts to unpack the ways in which changing discourses of medicine were not simple linear progressions. Throughout this, and subsequent chapters, the clean narrative of scientific progress, decline of wonder, and professionalization of medicine is complicated by public concerns of scientific limitations, the persistence of wonder, and the deep entanglement of the medical profession with popular entertainment discourses.

Reflecting the logic of scientific classification, John Collins Warren, and other medical men, arranged Chang and Eng within a longer teratological history. Often extraordinary bodies are

141 Elizabeth Grosz, “Intolerable Ambiguity: Freaks as/at the Limit,” in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson, (New York University Press, 1996): 55-69.

142 Rosemarie Garland Thomson, “Introduction: From Wonder to Error—A Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity,” in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson, (New York University Press, 1996): 3.

framed publicly by a rhetoric of rarity, wherein phrases such as “rarities” were recognized as synonyms with “freak” and “monster” throughout the 19th century.¹⁴³ At the turn of the 19th century, among the general public, Chang and Eng were likely the first, and only, conjoined human beings most individuals would have seen. Among scientific and medical communities, however, genealogical and classification histories of monstrous births were marshalled to reframe the popular rhetoric of rarity. Warren goes as far as to assert that “A union of the bodies of twins by various parts, is not an unusual occurrence.”¹⁴⁴ Warren’s double negative, conjoined twins are *not unusual*, resituates the extraordinary body as a commonplace of natural order.

From within the convergent situation of the professionalization of medicine and scientization of teratology, Warren and the medical men that would follow him in examining Chang and Eng likewise published their accounts in medical journals regionally, nationally, and internationally. Abel Coffin arranged a private exhibition of Chang and Eng for John Collins Warren and several of his Harvard colleagues, prior to his exhibition of the twins to the general Boston public. Warren, who had become a central figure in the Boston medical scene, in part, because of his exhibitions in the surgical theatre, likely jumped at the chance to examine the twins.¹⁴⁵ Coffin’s arrangement with Warren and the Harvard medical men is suggestive of a trend in the promotion and exhibition of extraordinary people in the 19th century, where aspiring showmen would provide access to exceptional case studies for medical professionals seeking to produce knowledge about human anatomy at its limits in order to cultivate a sense of scientific authenticity in their exhibitions for the general public. This routine, of being exhibited privately

143 Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

144 Warren, “An Account,” 255.

145 Edward Warren, *The Life of John Collins Warren, M.D. Compiled Chiefly from his Autobiography and Journals*, (Boston, 1860).

for medical professionals and then publicly for the general public, would reoccur throughout Chang's and Eng's early exhibitions under the management of Coffin. In the next section, I analyze Warren's account published for medical professionals to unpack some of the rhetorical aspects of medical enfreakment. Warren's account offers a complex set of ways of looking at, writing about, and touching some bodies that reinforce conceptualizations of what constitutes the "norm."

3.2 "Warren's Account": Looking and Touching as Rhetorics of Medical Enfreakment

Warren situates Chang and Eng within a longer, and more recent, record of conjoined twins. In addition to Chang and Eng, Warren references a contemporary account of conjoined twins, "two girls who lived to the age of ten" and mentions the Hungarian Sisters, Helen and Judith, among a "multitude of similar monstrosities" recorded in the *Philosophical Transactions*, "most of them born dead, or dying soon after birth."¹⁴⁶ While Aristotle is a lasting figure in the history of teratology, among early 19th century medical men it was the work of 15th century French anatomist Ambroise Paré that often figured as a foundational record of monsters in history.¹⁴⁷ Among the "collections of anatomists" that have recorded conjoined twins throughout history, Warren cites Ambrose Paré's depiction of conjoined twins in *On Monsters and Marvels* as the most lasting influence. Significantly, Warren describes the publication of *Monsters and Marvels* as for the "entertainment of his readers."¹⁴⁸ In tying together Paré's study of monsters to

¹⁴⁶ Warren, "An Account," p. 255.

¹⁴⁷ Yuri Kondratiev, "Corporeal Abnormality as Intellectual and Cultural Capital: Jean Fernal's *Pathologia Libri*, Ambroise Pare's *Des Monstres et Prodiges*, and Michel de Montaigne's *Essais*," in *New Directions in Literature and Medicine Studies*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017): 223-241.

¹⁴⁸ Warren, "An Account," 255. See also Ambroise Paré, *On Monsters and Marvels*, trans. Janis Pallister (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

entertainment, Warren suggests a longer history not only of the appearance of conjoined twins in medical records, but a longer history of scientific knowledge productions of conjoined twins and their influence on literary imagination and popular entertainment.

Warren's "Account" on one hand refutes the rhetoric of rarity by way of the longer tradition of describing and classifying conjoined twins, however, he engages in a rhetoric of exceptionalism to situate Chang and Eng within that tradition as a rationale for the circulation of his examination among medical men. Warren argues that "The Siamese boys" present "the most remarkable case of this *lusus naturae*" given "the perfection and distinctness of their organization" and "the length of time they have lived."¹⁴⁹ For Warren, what makes Chang and Eng a particularly remarkable case is the composition of Chang's and Eng's bodies as two individuals connected together as one. Measured by a sense of individualist symmetry and length of life, Warren frames Chang and Eng as exceptional even among the extraordinary. For the purposes of establishing medical knowledge such exceptional cases became valuable material to construct a norm and for the purposes of entertainers the exceptional became the rhetorical basis of the appeal for the public to come to pay to gaze. Enfreakment as a way of looking was not only circumscribed to popular entertainment situations, but also thoroughly imbedded in the medical exhibition scene.

3.2.1 Warren's Medical Gaze

Immediately preceding Warren's "Account" in *The American Journal of Medical Sciences* was the publication of another "Notice of Two Children whose Bodies were united anteriorly" and three engravings depicting the "Two Children" and "Siamese Brothers." Dr. Wilson Moore's

¹⁴⁹ Warren, "An Account," 255.

notice of an examination that he, along with his father Dr. Robert Moore and colleague Dr. Thomas Barker, made of “a twin monster” born May 21st, 1829.¹⁵⁰ The twins, who are unnamed throughout the notice, as Chang and Eng are similarly unnamed in Warren’s account, are characterized as appearing to be “two perfect females, united together by the lower part of the thorax” and of an “ordinary size.”¹⁵¹ While they “appeared healthy, though feeble” to Dr. Moore, they lived only for a brief time, after which their bodies were subjected to a medical dissection and autopsy.

Two engravings, produced by J. Drayton of Philadelphia, of the unnamed twins appear on the page opposite of the “Notice.” One drawing of the unnamed twins depicts them as they were “united in life” and the second depicts a “cross section of their internal organs” following their autopsy. Dr. Moore, drawing upon presumed credibility based on medical professionalism, verifies the engravings as presenting “a correct view.”¹⁵² Dr. Moore’s verification of the translation work involved by the engraver moving an eyewitness account to an image on the printed page highlights the authority of medical power in focusing the ways of looking at bodies. Rhetoric of the “correct view” is a normalizing gesture that privileges singular ways of looking and knowing; that is, that there is a “correct” way of viewing and it is the viewpoint of the medical man, Dr. Moore. Moreover, given the images of the unnamed twins presented and the desire and practices of autopsy, the medical gaze centers practices of *look through* and *looking at* the dead bodies of extraordinary others. For the purposes of accumulating medical knowledge the autopsy of the dead children was as good as the opportunity to add cases to the history of conjoined twins as the

150 J. Wilson Moore, “Notice of Two Children whose Bodies were united anteriorly, and Lived sometime after Birth,” *The American Journal of Medical Sciences*, No IX, Vol V, Nov 1829 (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea and Carey): 252-253.

151 Moore, “Notice,” 252.

152 Moore, “Notice,” 252.

examination of Chang and Eng. However, there is a sense that both cases take on an additional layer of credibility their adjacent arrangement in the journal layout.

The engravings of the unnamed children appear right next to a sketch of Chang and Eng, one of the first prominently circulated images of the “Siamese Twins.” Rhetorically, arranged next to the account of Chang and Eng, both by image and in written word, the notice of the two children works by way of an accumulation of knowledge to refine the classification of conjoined beings. Drayton’s image, which it is unclear if he had personally seen Chang and Eng before drawing for publication, closely resembles the earliest engravings of the “Siamese Twins” used for the promotion and sold for a small fee at their popular exhibitions.¹⁵³ In both cases the image of the “Siamese Youths” depicts Chang and Eng standing side by side, one with their arm around the waist of the other while the other has their hand on the shoulder of his brother. Their hair, long queues wrapped around and setting upon their heads. Their dress, what would later be referred to as “dressed in their traditional clothing,” including long pants and a buttoned jacket. There are two slight variations in the images; first, Drayton represents Chang and Eng as wearing shoes and, second the representation of the band connecting the twins differ in ways that drew some public attention.

153 By September 1st, reproductions of the engraving of Chang and Eng as the “Siamese Boys” was “already before the public” and, in the same article contested as “exaggerating” the length of the connection between the twins and misrepresents the scarification of the connective “band” between the brothers (“The Siamese Brothers,” *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, September 1, 1829; 2, 29: 459). By mid-September the engraving was being sold throughout the country by groups such as the Literary Book Store, alongside other images, including “Sleeping Jesus” (*Eastern Argus*, published as *Eastern Argus SemiWeekly* (Portland, Maine), 9/18/1829). By October, when Chang and Eng had arrived to be exhibited in Philadelphia, the image became a staple in the newspaper advertisement promotion of the public exhibition of the twins (*Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser*, published as *Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser*. (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), 10/10/1829, Page 3). At some point in New York, the engraving was printed on a handbill above an account of the twins by New York medical men, Samuel Mitchell and Anderson, who had “forwarded” the handbill internationally to the French medical community representing the first circulation of the image of Chang and Eng from America across the Atlantic (*Richmond Enquirer* (Richmond, Virginia), 10/29/1829).

Given the importance of the “image” in the rhetoric of enfreakment, it is significant that the arrangement of the first national professional medical “Account” of Chang and Eng is first by an engraving and only after by written description. Orientalism and enfreakment are conjoined processes as the image of Chang and Eng emphasizes the debilities of their conjoined bodies as well as exaggerates the image of racialized difference influenced by the prominence of phrenology. A central component of this orientalist and phrenological enfreakment is in the early image constructions of the “Siamese Youths,” which are influenced by orientalist tropes and phrenological racialization of skulls. For example, in both images the facial features of Chang and Eng are drawn, in a reflection of the phrenological inflection of Warren’s teratology. As much as providing a “correct view” of the twins, they are sketched with a sense of exaggerated racialized facial figures, including the shaping of the eyes and brows, pursed lips, and sharp angle drawn to their foreheads. Asserting racialized truths in the physical description of the bodies, and, in particular, skulls of extraordinary bodies, Moore and Warren’s “correct view,” the unnamed viewpoint of the white male medical professional, reveals the importance of the image in medical professionalization and the entanglement of race and disability in medical enfreakment rhetorics.

3.2.2 Warren’s Medical Touch

When Warren finally turns his attention to his description of his examination of the conjoinment of Chang and Eng, his “Account” proceeds from the framework of normative individualism and measures Chang and Eng against imagined figure of an autonomous individual. Reflecting the shift from wonder to error described by Garland Thomson, Warren also engages in a scientific rhetoric styled in a mode of neutrality and objectivity that would become characteristic of 19th century teratology. Warren’s description of the “cord” that conjoins Chang and Eng is

filtered first through calculable metrics, providing measurements of its length and circumference, describing its firmness, and claiming that their “connexion: was strong with no great sense of shared sensibility.”¹⁵⁴ As Elizabeth Grosz notes, “Teratology driven by medicine rather than superstition rendered what was horrifying and fascinating about such individuals into neutral facts described in scientific terminology that places them within a continuum that has normal as the ideal.”¹⁵⁵ In each case of describing Chang’s and Eng’s bodies, in particular their conjoinment, Warren filters their bodies through a rhetoric of scientific and medical inquiry and reproduced as objective figures that medical men saw as an opportunity to produce “interesting observations, in regard to physiology and pathology.”¹⁵⁶

Medical examinations not only included descriptions of Chang’s and Eng’s from the medical gaze at a distance, but they also reported of the consequences of their experimental touches between the medical men and Chang and Eng themselves. Sometimes this medical touch was represented as coming from the invitation of Chang and Eng. For example, Warren asserts that Chang and Eng “allow themselves to be pulled by a rope fastened to it, [the cord] without exhibiting uneasiness,” in order to establish the coordination of the twins.¹⁵⁷ Given the language barriers and the assertion of medical authority to examine extraordinary bodies, and raced bodies, the notion that Chang and Eng “allowed” themselves to be pulled around by a rope for the gratification of curious medical men seems suspect and most likely is a rhetorical obfuscation of the physical violence that they endured as part of their lives in exhibition. However, resituating Chang and Eng as active agents in the scene of measurement reveals that repetitions of medical

154 Warren, “An Account,” 254.

155 Elizabeth Grosz, “Intolerable Ambiguity: Freaks as/at the Limit,” In *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, edited by Rosemarie Garland Thomson, (New York: New York University Press, 1996): 55-69.

156 Warren, “An Account,” 254.

157 Warren, “An Account,” 254.

interventions and testing that suggest common disregard for the perspectives and feelings of Chang and Eng.

Reading against the grain of a neutral examination, these accounts of violence become some of the most palpable common aspects in the early experiment that sought to determine the points of shared sentiment between the two that often involved causing pain as a way of measuring points of individuality. Medical professionals, and the general public at large, sought to determine to what extents Chang and Eng were one individual or two individuals. The most common experiment to test the point and extent of the connection of sensation between the brothers consisted of placing pressure, often to the point of the expression of pain on the part of Chang and Eng, on points of the conjoining tissue of the twins from the center toward Chang and Eng and suggesting that what was shared could be named by the point at which only one twin could recognize the sensation. Warren describes his findings from this experiment by suggesting “There is no part of them, which has a common perception, excepting the middle of the connecting cord and space near it. When a pointed instrument is applied precisely in the middle of the cord, it is felt by both; and also, for about an inch on each side; beyond which the impression is limited to the individual on the side touched.”¹⁵⁸ This experiment, which takes Chang and Eng as objects and generally has no consideration for their pain, was repeated consistently throughout their northeast and European tours to the same effect. That the repetitions of pain for the twins was necessary to establish a point of connection and separation there is evidence that only the perceptions of the medical professionals, each time repeated, could establish such knowledge and that Chang and Eng could not speak for their own sense of conjoinment.

158 Warren, “An Account,” 254.

3.2.3 Teratological Racialization: Intersectionality of Rhetorics of Enfreakment

While it might be presumed that medical discourse on Chang and Eng is simply, or centrally, a story about what it today spoken of in terms of disability, a close reading of Warren's "Account" is suggestive of many of the ways in which enfreakment stories are entangled with stories of nationality, race, and gender. Warren's understanding of comparative anatomy was influenced by his study in Paris and the anatomical theories of Franz Joseph Gall, a foundational figure in the racist science of phrenology.¹⁵⁹ In the first published American study of physical anthropology, Warren classified racial difference in a comparative study of the skulls of "American Races."¹⁶⁰ Unlike other phrenological assumptions of the time, Warren concluded that cranial differences could assist in the arrangement of essentially different races but that such differences were not intrinsically linked to intellectual ability or moral disposition.¹⁶¹ Taking his phrenologically influenced perspective of anatomy to his examination of Chang and Eng, Warren describes them as of "moderate stature," but not "as tall as boys of that age [18 years old] in this country." He continues his description in racialized terms, suggesting that while "they have the Chinese complexion and physiognomy" generally, their "forehead [sic] is more elevated and less broad than that of the Chinese, owing to malformation."¹⁶² Similar to the phrenological framework that undergirded colonial curiosity of John Crawford and George Finlayson sketched in the previous chapter, it is striking that Chang and Eng are described in the racialized schematic as of a "Chinese Type," rather than as particularly "Siamese." Anxiety about the racialized classification

159 Anthony A. Walsh, "Phrenology and the Boston medical community in the 1830s," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 50(2) (1976): 261-273.

160 John Collins Warren, *A Comparative View of the Sensorial and Nervous Systems in Men and Animals*, (Boston, 1822).

161 Edward Warren, *The Life of John Collins Warren*, (Boston, 1860).

162 Warren, "An Account," 253.

of the twins, and in particular speculation about their “true parentage,” became a commonplace in the early discourse surrounding the exhibitions of the “Siamese Youths.” However, I want to highlight that the first “malformation” that Warren describes is not that of the twins’ physical conjoinment, but instead the shape of their skulls given the imagination of a normative “Chinese Type.” What Warren’s “Account” reveals, in part, is that teratology was deeply racialized within the rhetorical framework of phrenology.

It is significant that Warren’s “Account” does not begin with a description of the physical embodiment of the twins. Without firsthand knowledge of Chang’s and Eng’s earlier lives, Warren makes use of a comparative racialized phrenology to situate the boys in a national, racial, and gendered schematic. Warren starts his “Account” by describing the assumed conditions of Chang’s and Eng’s lives in Siam. Offering a national, social, and cultural backdrop to his “Account,” Warren asserts that Chang and Eng were born in an unnamed village in Siam, where they lived in poverty and subsisted through fishing while being “confined” by their government.¹⁶³ While Warren does not explicate what he means by “confinement” in Siam, a point I will return to in the conclusion of this chapter, his framing of the social, economic, and political contexts from which Chang and Eng resonate with commonplace American orientalist descriptions of Siamese poverty and “backwards” governance.

Warren did not have a first-hand account of the circumstances of Chang’s and Eng’s lives in Siam. Given language barriers that limited direct communication between Chang and Eng and Warren, it seems likely that Warren was relying on, and repeating, information about Chang’s and Eng’s lives in Siam from speaking with Abel Coffin. Often throughout the early exhibitions of Chang and Eng, Coffin assumed the role of speaking for, and even more often speaking about,

¹⁶³ Warren, “An Account,” p. 253.

Chang and Eng.¹⁶⁴ Despite the presumption of medical and scientific neutrality provided by the situation of Warren's position, Coffin's perspective is not neutral. Coffin was influenced by his own orientalist ideology, economic self-interest in promoting the successful commercial exhibition of Chang and Eng, and concern with managing his own public image as a purveyor of extraordinary spectacle. Warren's repetition of Coffin's description of the conditions of Chang's and Eng's lives in Siam not only reveals the ways in which the medical scene of examination was already in translation, but that medical expertise and authority could be marshalled to verify Coffin's claims. Warren's repetition of orientalist frame of Siamese political backwardness and economic poverty rhetorically works to situate Coffin's exhibition of Chang and Eng as a benevolent opportunity afforded to the twins to escape the confines of their social circumstances by way of access to the American political progressivism and economic opportunity. The framing of Abel Coffin as a benevolent paternal figure would become a critical talking point among the public and interpersonally as the earliest exhibitions of Chang and Eng became to make their way across the Atlantic.

Coffin's role in speaking for Chang and Eng is also critically important because he describes his relationship with Chang and Eng within the language of slavery. Reflecting the language that Abel Coffin used in his letter to Susan Coffin aboard the *Sachem*, Warren asserts that Chang and Eng were "purchased of their mother" by Abel Coffin and Mr. Hunter, who he characterizes as "the owners" of the boys.¹⁶⁵ Regardless of where the language was derived from, Warren's description of the relationship between Chang and Eng, Coffin, and Hunter as one of

164 Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," *Cultural Critique*, 20 (1991), 5-32.

165 Warren, "An Account," 253.

having been *sold* and being *owned*, brought forth the specter of slavery that haunted the early exhibitions of the twins in the United States.

Warren's account, from its recirculation of Coffin's anecdotal frame, assumption of the authority of his medical gaze, dynamics of experimental touching and sanitized description, and predictions of death were formulated for, and alongside, other medical men. However, Warren's account had many audiences. As a way of bridging Warren's medical rhetoric of enfreakment with the popular entertainment rhetorics of enfreakment the next section analyzes the public letter Warren wrote promoting the public attendance of the exhibitions of the "Siamese Youths."

3.3 (Re)Circulating Warren's Account: Entanglements of Medical and Popular

Enfreakment

John Warren's "Account" was not only produced and circulated among medical men; it also became a template for the uses of medical accounts to promote the popular exhibitions of the "Siamese Youths." Abel Coffin, and later managers James Hale and Charles Harris, drew upon medical accounts to verify the authenticity of the connection of the twins and to provide an allure of scientific cover to the exploitative exhibitions of the twins, a form of "social cover" for cultural anxieties surrounding the appropriateness of paying to gaze at others.¹⁶⁶ In a letter published widely as an advertisement, Warren, "in compliance with" the "request" of an unnamed man and "in obedience" to what he considered "a professional duty," sought to "give some account of the

¹⁶⁶ Rachel Adams, *Sideshow U.S.A.: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination*, (University of Chicago Press, 2001).

Siamese Boys, and particularly the medium, by which they are united together.”¹⁶⁷ Warren’s sense of a professional duty to provide a public accounting of his examination of Chang and Eng is a notable example of the public facing rhetoric of science in the early 19th century and the open embrace of examinations of extraordinary bodies as a respectable medical practice at the time. Warren concludes his account by offering the unnamed man full “liberty to employ the above statement in such way as you think likely to be useful.”¹⁶⁸ Warren’s remarks suggest the entanglement of the public role of medical rhetoric and newspapers in promoting popular entertainment.

Warren’s public account differed from his medical account in two significant ways. First, Warren skipped his account of Chang’s and Eng’s early lives in Siam and how they came to be under the management of Captain Coffin, presumably, in part, because Coffin would be present to offer his account of their background that Warren recirculates in his “Account.” Instead, Warren centers his examination and description of the twins’ complexion, physiognomy, and connective “cord.” Second, Warren’s account also differed in his conclusion, in which he reassures him of the public that “there is nothing unpleasant in the aspect of these boys” and that “they must be viewed as presenting one of the most interesting objects of natural history.”¹⁶⁹ Warren both preempts potential public concern that the scene of exhibition may be unseemly and amplifies the extraordinary opportunity to pay to gaze upon a rare natural phenomenon worthy of consideration among all of the most preeminent medical men. In concluding his public letter, Warren acts as scientific promoter of the twins’ public exhibition. Warren’s account circulated as promotional

167 John C. Warren, “Some account of the Siamese Boys, lately brought to Boston,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, August 27, 1829. The “unnamed man” is most likely Abel Coffin given later medical broadsides used in the promotion of Chang’s and Eng’s exhibitions.

168 Warren, “Some Account,” August 27, 1829.

169 Warren, “Some Account,” August 27, 1829.

material in newspapers throughout the northeast states of the country alongside the touring twins and was later abridged again and appended to the first show biography produced for the exhibition of the “Siamese Twins.”

Warren frames his account as a professional obligation, as a practice of medical men’s responsibility to explain the natural world to the general public. His enfreakment for the public is written from an ethos of scientific expertise and objectivity and would continue to have a lasting impact on how managers and public audiences received the “Siamese Youths.” Warren’s account could educate the general public about medical enfreakment, but it was not the only or final word that audiences considered. In the next section I will unpack some of the ways in which medical enfreakment was variously internalized and contested as the “Siamese Youth” were staged for a general paying public throughout the Northeast.

3.4 Popular Enfreakment: Exhibiting the “Siamese Youths” From Providence to Philadelphia

I have referred to rhetoric(s) of enfreakment in the plural to indicate not only the potential variation of enfreakment within certain discursive communities – such as the medical community – but also to name the reality that enfreakment occurred across many audiences. In this section I will suggest that there are similarities and differences between commonplace rhetorical practices of enfreakment by medical men and the general population that are worth unpacking while recognizing some of the entangled circulations of enfreakment between them. Popular enfreakment shares visual and tactile rhetorical elements as with medical discourses, even as the staged exhibitions gave rise to a more unruly setting and raised social questions that were

frequently sublimated in medical communication. Following the “Siamese Youths” exhibitions from Boston, to Providence, then New York and Philadelphia, offers some of the rhetorical elements of popular enfreakment that Chang and Eng would need to navigate as arrivants in the 1830s United States.

3.4.1 Popular Gazing: Looking High, Looking Low, and Looking Back

On September 8th, 1829, a notice of the imminent arrival of the “Siamese Twins” was printed in newspapers in Providence, Rhode Island. Providence was a stop-over on the way to New York, a travel route encouraged by way of a developing roadway system throughout the northeast of the United States. The *Rhode-Island American* announced that “The Siamese Twins, who have excited so much wonder in Boston, by their extraordinary union, will visit this town, and remain here only on Friday and Saturday next, when they will proceed to New York.”¹⁷⁰ Drawing on their popular appeal in Boston, their extraordinary bodies, and highlighting the relatively short tenure of their visit, the exhibitions of the “Siamese Twins” were advertised as for “all sorts of curiosity people, from philosophers to simple gazers,” each of whom “will find food for admiration in visiting these singular beings.”¹⁷¹ Appealing to an already constituted audience and constituting an appeal to an imagined audience, Rhode Island newspapers brought together an array of interests under the heading of “curiosity people” that would be drawn to the exhibition. The pleasure of these curious lookers, expressed culinarily as “finding food,” raises the concern that bell hooks named in the context of blackness, popular culture, and looking: “eating the other.” As hooks

170 “Siamese Twins,” *Rhode-Island American*, published as Rhode Island American, Statesman and Providence Gazette (Providence, Rhode Island), 9/8/1829.

171 “Siamese Twins,” *Rhode-Island American*, 9/8/1829.

noted, an “over-riding fear is that cultural, ethnic, and racial differences will be continually commodified and offered up as new dishes to enhance the white palate—that the Other will be eatenm consumed, and forgotten.”¹⁷² Early staged exhibitions of Chang and Eng as the “Siamese Twins” was a site for such curious commodification and consumption.

While the exhibition of the “Siamese Twins” provided the opportunity of eating the other for some “curiosity people,” not all of the Providence public were as excited by the prospects of Chang’s and Eng’s arrival. In Providence, Chang and Eng were arranged to be exhibited at Franklin Hall, the local center for performances, lectures and exhibitions and a vital social and public space in early 19th century Providence.¹⁷³ At the time of the “Siamese Twins” arrival, Franklin Hall was being managed by Mr. Chapin who had curated a “fine collection” of paintings in the gallery space. Season ticket holders were asked to wait until the following week to resume their access to the hall, but if someone were to purchase a ticket to see the exhibition of the “Siamese Twins” at the cost of 50 cents, they were allowed to see the gallery of paintings for no additional charge. Debate over the uses of public space offers a reminder that, as itinerant exhibitions, the “Siamese Twins” were moving into and out of spaces and communities already producing various competing entertainments.

Mr. Chapin’s arrangement did not satisfy everyone in Providence. One newspaper reported that “A correspondent complains that the holders of season tickets to the Gallery of paintings are deprived of the use of those tickets, during the exhibition of the Siamese Boys, and denies the right

172 bell hooks, “Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance,” in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992): 39.

173 Jane Lancaster, *Inquire Within: A Social History of the Providence Athenaeum since 1753*, (Providence, Rhode Island: The Providence Athenaeum, 2003).

of—Chapin to substitute other days, for those during which that exhibition continues.”¹⁷⁴ The *Rhode Island American* sought to defend Mr. Chapin from such public complaints, suggesting that it was reasonable for Mr. Chapin to host the “Siamese Twins.” Denying a mercenary economic motive, they suggested that Mr. Chapin “probably derives but little advantage from leasing the Hall for the exhibition of the Siamese boys, and as that exhibition is totally distinct from the Paintings, though both may now be seen for 50 cents.” The *Rhode Island American* appealed to the deference of season ticket holders to allow for the “accommodation of the individuals concerned and of the public” good of having the limited opportunity to pay to gaze upon the extraordinary twins. Describing the exhibitions of Chang and Eng as “totally distinct” from the gallery of paintings, the newspaper suggests that the public display of the “Siamese Twins” was seen as a distinct (perhaps ‘lower’) form of cultural entertainment in contrast to the (perhaps ‘high’) cultural viewing of the “attractive” gallery. Such contrasts even became part of the appeal of the exhibitions. Some noted that Chang and Eng took the opportunity to “examine the paintings in the Hall with much interest” and “great vivacity,” at once inverting the role of performer and audience and suggesting that the “Siamese Boys” looking upon such fine arts is itself part of the curious exhibition. By bringing together the two exhibitions for one price, Mr. Chapin may have invited an audience to explore the blurred boundaries between such cultural distinctions of entertainment.

Enfreakment can include such staged scenes of encounter between the starrer and stare, but the relationship is interactional.¹⁷⁵ Chang and Eng are represented as not simply the objects of the gaze of the curious onlookers, but curious lookers as well. While the figuration of Chang and Eng

174 “Gallery,” *Rhode-Island American*, published as *Rhode Island American*, *Statesman and Providence Gazette* (Providence, Rhode Island), 9/15/1829.

175 Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look*, (Oxford University Press, 2009): 79-98.

looking at the paintings may be part of an aggrandizing curiosity discourse, behind such frames is the reality that Chang and Eng were lookers themselves. While the earliest exhibitions of Chang and Eng as the “Siamese Twins” rarely conveyed a sense of their perspective. Evidence that Chang and Eng were making judgements about their audiences and tastes is clearer from letters written later describing their audiences as sometimes “full of dull stupid persons” and the show biography written after the separation from the Coffins’ management, which names and marks the various curiosities they observed over the course of their exhibitions.¹⁷⁶ While the written records tends to center Chang and Eng as objects of curious onlookers, the performative moment of their exhibitions were often much more unruly and excessive to the capture of the commodifying gaze.

Regardless of the opposition of some in Providence, the “Siamese Twins” was a popular entertainment for many others as the published reviews of the exhibition suggest. The *Providence Patriot* noted that many had “already gratified their curiosity” by attending the exhibition of “this surprising effort of nature” and that given all that had already been written about they could “add nothing to what has already been established about these youths.”¹⁷⁷ The exhibition of the “Siamese Boys” included watching Chang and Eng “engage with their companion,” Tien, who is described as “a lively Chinese boy,” in games such as “checkers and battledore.”¹⁷⁸ Reviews of the exhibition of the “Siamese Twins” foregrounded the amiable disposition of Chang and Eng. The “Siamese Twins” are “cheerful,” with “nothing unpleasant in the exhibition to deter any from witnessing so remarkable a conformation,” one Providence paper wrote.¹⁷⁹ Echoing the rhetoric of

176 Letter, Charles Harris to Susan Coffin, January 16, 1832. [p. 3-4]; James W. Hale, *A Few Particulars Concerning Chang-Eng, the United Siamese Brothers*, Published under Their Own Direction. New York: J. M. Elliott, 1836.

177 “Siamese Boys,” *Providence Patriot*, published as *Providence Patriot & Columbian Phenix* (Providence, Rhode Island), 9/12/1829

178 “Siamese Boys,” *Rhode-Island American*, published as *Rhode Island American, Statesman and Providence Gazette* (Providence, Rhode Island), 9/15/1829.

179 “Siamese Boys,” *Rhode-Island American*, published as *Rhode Island American, Statesman and Providence Gazette* (Providence, Rhode Island), 9/15/1829.

enjoyment in Warren's "Account," the Providence public read Chang's and Eng's pleasure in their racialized enfreaked exhibitions. The newspaper goes on to suggest that "except the ligament uniting them, their external appearance and manners are rather prepossessing; though the form is by no means beautiful." Without reducing Chang and Eng to pure victims of their exhibition, it should not be missed that such reading of Chang's and Eng's joy and beauty is from the perspective of the public paying to gaze. Moreover, the description of the "Siamese Twins" as not "unpleasant" and yet not "beautiful" is both a racialized and ableist rhetoric of the looking experience of the audiences paying to gaze.

3.4.2 Popular Enfreakment: Questioning Scientific Authority and Troubling Singleton

Society

The exhibitions of the "Siamese Twins" were not only the topic of conversation among those who had the opportunity to personally pay to gaze. Providence newspapers invited those who could not attend to read the recent article in the *New England Galaxy*, "worth fifty cents of any man's money."¹⁸⁰ The *Galaxy* raised those "curious questions," those questions of the "moral consequences" of being conjoined, that Warren, and other medical men, often selected not to openly consider.¹⁸¹ The public discourse, even more than within medical discourses, was invited to consider the ways in which Chang and Eng posed as "a metaphysical as well a natural monster," as the widely circulated *New England Galaxy* traveled alongside the earliest exhibitions of the

180 "From the Boston Courier the Siamese Boys" *The Washington Whig* (Bridgeton, New Jersey), 9/12/1829; "The Siamese Boys," *Newburyport Herald* (Newburyport, Massachusetts), 9/15/1829; "The Siamese Boys," *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), 9/12/1829.

181 Warren, "An Account," 255.

“Siamese Youths” suggests.¹⁸² The *Galaxy* account of the “Siamese Boys” begins by presenting the twins within a rhetoric of pity, as the “two pretty lads” are claimed to have been “condemned” to “live in a manner alone in the community without the benefits of individuality or the prerogatives of single gentleman.” The presumption of the singleton masculine good animates the objectifying pity and curiosity of the authors of the *Galaxy* article. However, for the readers of the *Galaxy*, the public encounter with “The Siamese Twins” was most centrally tied to troubling questions for logical, religious, and legal claims grounded in a sense of autonomous individualism.

If among medical men conjoined twins were read through a lens of scientific error and the medical men were called upon to testify to the scientific interest in reading conjoined twins for the general public, the general public frequently refused to have their wonder stifled and drew their own questions and answers from their encounters with conjoined twins. For the readers of the *Galaxy*, conjoined twins were framed within a lasting popular imagination of witchcraft. First, the author intertextually ties them to the literary legacy of the witches of Macbeth by titling the article, “Double, double, toil and trouble.” And second, the author poses the “Siamese Boys” as an instance “witchcraft of logic,” calling into question the common syllogism based on the premise “*idem est idem*” and philosophical inquiry into “what’s what” and “who’s who.” These intertextual linkages to witchcraft reveal a lasting legacy of extra-scientific explanation, or wonder, within the ethos of scientific error that framed the public exhibitions of the “Siamese Twins.”

Imagined as having been brought into the world for the pleasure and frustration of the singleton public, the *Galaxy* foregrounds Chang and Eng as objects for consideration for the audience rather than having an intrinsic worth. The *Galaxy* frames the “Siamese Boys” as a “trick which dame Nature has taken it into her head to play for the special purpose of confounding the

182 “The Siamese,” *New England Galaxy*, September 4, 1829.

wits of us poor mortals.” They continue that “it seems as if the very genius of botheration had contrived that this extraordinary job-work of nature should be picked up at the other end of the world, in we know not what queer corner of the land of the living and brought among us for nothing but a puzzle to our intellectuals—a wonder to the mind as well as to the eye—a metaphysical as well as a natural monster.” Invoking an orientalist imagination of an unmapped, wild, or “queer” part of the world, the *Galaxy* centers the visual and mental trouble that conjoined twins pose to a singleton society. The *Galaxy* goes on to claim that as “simple as these young fellows are, they cannot fail to suggest some knotty questions to the sharpest anatomizers of entities and quiddities that ever chopped logic or sent their brains a wool-gathering among the categories of Aristotle.” It is unclear what is meant by “simple,” perhaps a racialized dismissal of the intellectual value of Chang and Eng and reduction of them to a mere physical presence. Regardless, the twins’ physical embodiment is posed as extraordinary trouble beyond the scope and skill of pure logical and scientific account.

The double monstrosity of Chang and Eng, “natural” and “metaphysical,” became a commonplace framework for public discourses of enfreakment with regard to their bodies. The “Siamese Youth” were troubling for social institutions grounded in possessive individualism. As the writers in the *Galaxy* noted, the “Siamese Youths” presented as a confounding case for Christian religious doctrines that assumed individuals’ souls may be saved through baptisms and legal doctrines that assumed individual accountability and responsibility within the scope of the law could be clearly determined. After all, the *Galaxy* writers speculate about a case in which either Chang or Eng commits a crime and the ontological troubling a court would face in attempting to hold one accountable without unjustly holding the other accountable. While the *Galaxy* speculated about such legal troubles they became, potentially, performative and lived in

the exhibitions of the “Siamese Youths” in Philadelphia only a short while later. Figuring the “Siamese as socially troubling would become a commonplace exhibition trope of enfreakment, even as Chang and Eng had to navigate everyday contradictions of living in a society arranged for singletons.

3.4.3 Popular Touching: Touching Back and Limits of Public Touching

If the “looking back,” or stares, of Chang and Eng were insufficient to call into question the normative conceptualizations of individualism, Chang’s “touching back,” or slap, certainly was posed as trouble for normative social order. As Chang and Eng were preparing to leave for Europe, the trouble Chang and Eng posed to legal system grounded in the assumption of possessive individualism had reportedly taken on a performative dimension in Philadelphia. Philadelphia newspapers reported an incident in which a man in the audience had squeezed “Chien’s” hand “so hard as to hurt him.” In response Chien “slapped” the abusive man of the audience forcefully enough to “stagger him.” In response to being staggered, the man from the audience applied for a warrant against Chien for assault and battery. The magistrate said that he would grant a warrant for Chien but warned that the warrant must not be used to arrest “Teng” or risk “prosecution for a false imprisonment.” Ultimately, the newspaper reported, “the prosecution was abandoned.”¹⁸³

Relayed as a “point for lawyers,” the anecdote was framed to emphasize the contradiction for a just enforcement of a legal system grounded on individual responsibility and accountability in the face of conjoined twins in their bodies. At stake was the risk of injustice of not enforcing the law against an individual convicted of a crime, “Chien,” and the false conviction of an innocent

¹⁸³ *Newburyport Herald* (Newburyport, Massachusetts), 10/20/1829.

individual, “Eing.” Conjoined twins are represented as a puzzling case in which the logic of law enforcement reached its limits.¹⁸⁴ While it is unclear if this Philadelphia anecdote is grounded in an actual series of events, I have not found documents to substantiate the story, it is suggestive of the commonplace use of the lives of Chang and Eng as part of the enfreaked exhibitions of the “Siamese Twins.”

The Philadelphia anecdote reveals more than the trouble for legalism grounded in individualism, it also exposes the presumption of the popular touch and the potential of touching back that were an element in the early public exhibitions of the “Siamese Twins.” The audience member’s painful touch was sanctioned by the roles and rituals assumed in the situation of Chang’s and Eng’s enfreaked exhibitions for the paying public. The presumption of the authority to touch was a line of identification between members of the audience: “we” are the ones who *touch* “them” and, in fact, “we” are a “we” and “they” are a “they” precisely because “we” *touch* “them.” Assumed to be included in the price of attending the early popular exhibitions of the “Siamese Youths,” like the medical exhibitions, was the opportunity to both gaze and touch Chang and Eng. The audience member’s touch was experimental and injurious. The audience member’s touch, a hand squeeze, was an amateur experiment that mimicked the professional medical examination of the twins by attempting to establish individuation through an account of shared sensation. That the audience member had squeezed Chang’s hand so hard as to cause pain suggests ways that the exhibition scene had an asymmetry of feeling, that gratification of public curiosity was prioritized over the feelings of Chang and Eng.

The anecdote also reveals the asymmetry in socially and legally sanctioned touching in the early 19th century United States. In the anecdote there is the unexamined conclusion made by the

184 “A Point for the Lawyers,” *Vermont Gazette*, (Bennington, Vermont), 11/17/1829.

magistrate that precedes the trouble of enforcing the law that conjoined twins pose to legal systems grounded in possessive individualism: that Chang, recognized as an individual, had committed a warrantable offense. Chang's "touching back," a hurtful slap, was recognized by both the audience member and a magistrate as a social and legal offense. Why would the audience member not be accountable for injury, but Chang would be found guilty? What accounts for this asymmetric treatment? It would be impossible to size up, of course, whether this account would diminish or increase interest by potential audiences, some of whom would presumably enjoyed such a spectacle, despite, or perhaps because of, the impropriety. In addition to posing ontological trouble to legal enforcement, Chang's slap troubled both the rules and rituals of the popular exhibition of extraordinary bodies that figured them as touched and of the norms and assumptions regulating the use of touch to harm social recognized as the solely the province of white men in Jacksonian America. Regardless of such a norm, read as a "touching back," "Chien" recognized in himself the righteousness of such a slap. The story of Chang's outstanding assault warrant was the last popularly circulated account of their exhibitions as they left Philadelphia for New York to board for Europe.

3.5 Separation Anxiety

One "solution" to the problem of the metaphysical and legal trouble, as much as the presumption of natural "errors," posed by conjoined twins was "surgical correction." In this section I analyze a series of public debates between medical men on the feasibility and appropriateness to medically separate Chang and Eng from each other. While these debates reflect the medical model of disability and the impulse to surgically "fix" natural "errors" in some instances, they also reflect

a distinct moment when surgeons were not as confident in their practical ability to complete the surgery without harm. More importantly, these debates also articulated professional and social arguments against the impulse to intervene and call into question the inevitability of the medical hubris to “fix” disability.

Public debates support my overarching argument that professional medical and popular entertainment rhetorics of enfreakment were deeply entangled. For example, the national debate between medical men in the United States was played out in major newspapers and became part of the newspaper’s reviews of the exhibitions of the Siamese Twins. Moreover, when the debate became international (as Chang and Eng were reportedly headed to France for further examination) the letters medical men sent to their French counterparts included the show poster that had been used to promote the exhibition of Chang and Eng in New York and included medical testimony alongside sensationalized show biography elements.

Warren offers the first professional medical opinion on the feasibility and appropriateness of surgically separating Chang and Eng from each other. From Warren’s perspective there seemed to be “nothing in the connecting medium which would render such an operation necessarily fatal.” However, he concludes that an attempt to carry out such a surgery does not appear “to be authorized under existing circumstances.”¹⁸⁵ Warren explains that “Surgeons are justified in putting the life of an individual at risk, when it becomes necessary in order to relieve him of a menacing disease; but it would not be proper to hazard life in order to procure some convenience, however desirable this might be.”¹⁸⁶ From this moral framework, Warren advocates against a surgical intervention until Chang and Eng can advocate for such an operation of their own volition.

¹⁸⁵ Warren, “An Account,” 255.

¹⁸⁶ Warren, “An Account,” 255.

“When the minds of these boys have been sufficiently cultivated to enable them to understand the nature and dangers of an operation; and the advantages they would derive from it, the subject might be presented to them; and if, with a full knowledge of the consequences, they desired and demanded the separation to be effected, it might be proper to undertake it,” Warren explains.¹⁸⁷ While the idea that Chang and Eng, at the age of 18 had not “cultivated” their minds sufficiently to make such an autonomous choices reflects a racist rhetoric of intellectual inferiority of Asian others, especially given his previous assertion of the intelligence of both the twins, his policy advocacy of autonomy of choice does displace some of the presumed authority of the medical professional to decide for the twins what would be best for them.

Warren’s argument is distinct from other physicians that would speculate on the viability and value of surgical intervention because he assumes that such a surgery would be possible without fatality, but he does not presume that such an intervention is intrinsically justified because their corporeal configuration is not life denying. Warren concludes with an advocacy for surgical intervention in the case of death explaining “Should one die before the other, they should be cut apart immediately” while recognizing that “The success of the operation would, of course, be affected by the nature of the mortal disease, and its influence [sic] of the constitution of the survivor.”¹⁸⁸ While Warren recommends caution in life he advocates for immediate intervention in case of death.

It would not be until Chang and Eng were exhibited before medical men in New York in October of 1829 that a public debate among medical professionals on the viability and exigency to separate Chang and Eng from each other. Arriving in New York, Chang and Eng were exhibited

¹⁸⁷ Warren, “An Account,” p. 255.

¹⁸⁸ Warren, “An Account,” p. 255.

for the New York Medical Society, including leading figures Dr. Samuel Latham Mitchill and his colleagues Dr. William Anderson and Dr. Felix Pascalis. Following the examination, Mitchill and Anderson's "Report" argued that separation of the twins would be fatal and was not medically ethical. Pascalis, however, argued that such a surgical intervention was both feasible and appropriate. The debate between Mitchill and Anderson and Pascalis emerged in New York newspapers and the debate circulated across the Atlantic, first by proxy in France and then throughout England and Scotland as Chang and Eng were exhibited for the medical men throughout the "Old World."

Dr. Samuel Latham Mitchill was trained in medicine at the University of Edinburgh in 1783 and returned to New York where he became involved in law and politics while continuing to contribute to the organization and production of the study of natural history and science throughout the state. In "Reminiscences" of his work and life, Mitchill was celebrated as a prominent figure, along with his wife, in the establishment of the New York Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the first to have conversation with "the afflicted mute by means of signs."¹⁸⁹ Mitchill has been remembered for a litany of accomplishments, but, in particular, "his great forte was natural history."¹⁹⁰ While Mitchill has not been remembered for his examination of Chang and Eng, he approached his exam within a similar framework as John Collins Warren: natural history and curiosity accounts.

By the time that Chang and Eng arrived in New York, Mitchill was nationally recognized as a leading scholar in the study of the natural sciences. Throughout the country men and women "sought his judgment and asked his decision" on a vast array of matters: "anomalous products in creation; monstrous formations in animality; hybrid plants; literary curiosities of remote nations;

¹⁸⁹ John W. Francis, *Reminiscences of Samuel Latham Mitchill, M.D., LL.D.* (New York: John F. Trow Printer, 1859), 9.

¹⁹⁰ Francis, *Reminiscences*, 15.

Indian hieroglyphics and illustrations of Indian mounds—all were subjected to his critical knowledge for opinion.”¹⁹¹ For example, on August 10th, 1829, only two months before his examination of Chang and Eng, Mitchell received a “few natural curiosities” sent from Charleston, South Carolina for his “intellectual survey.”¹⁹² Sent to Mitchell by a “Miss Coates,” the “creatures in the bottle” included three specimen, what she describes as a small offering, but of “superior worth and talent.” At the bottom of the letter Mitchell notes the “creatures in the bottle” included a “two headed snake,” another two headed animal, and “the larva of a frog whose tail had not disappeared though the legs were unfolded.”

In addition to circulating in newspapers, Mitchill and Anderson’s report was printed as a handbill used to advertise the public exhibition of the “Siamese Youths.” Like Warren’s testimony, Mitchill and Anderson’s account was also abridged and reprinted in the show biography that was sold at their exhibitions starting in New York, likely under the guidance of James Hale who took an active role in promoting the popular exhibitions of Chang and Eng throughout the Northeast Tour and the first European Tour.¹⁹³ While Dr. Pascalis suggested such a surgery would be possible with minimal risk, Mitchell and Anderson suggested that any separation would “expose them to enormous hernial protrusions, and inflammations that would certainly prove fatal.”¹⁹⁴ Mitchill turned to the national newspapers to express his concern that Pascalis was misrepresenting his own observations from his examination of the twins. The debate between the New York physicians

¹⁹¹ Francis, *Reminiscences*, 17.

¹⁹² Miss Coates AL to Samuel L[atham] Mitchill, August 10, [1829], in Samuel Latham Mitchill Papers, William L. Clements Library, The University of Michigan.

¹⁹³ Samuel L. Mitchill and William Anderson, “Siamese youths The following is a report from Dr. Samuel L. Mitchill and Dr. William Anderson, of this city ... upon the subject of the Siamese children at present exhibited at the Masonic Hall. New-York, 24th September 1829. To Capt. Coffin,” (New York] Elliott & Palmer, printers, 20 William-Street., [1829]); James Hale

¹⁹⁴ “The Siamese Boys,” *Providence Patriot*, published as Providence Patriot & Columbian Phenix (Providence, Rhode Island), 10/7/1829.

went international as Chang and Eng were being prepared to travel to Europe for their first exhibitions across the Atlantic. In response to a communication sent to the “Medical Society of Paris” from Dr. Felix Pascalis on the viability of separating the “Siamese Boys.”¹⁹⁵ In response, Mitchell and Anderson wrote a public letter addressed to “Mons. Nacquart, M.D.,” the ex-president and secretary general of the Medical Society of Paris in the Department of the Seine, suggesting that Pascalis’s conclusions were based on their examinations and ultimately “erroneous.”¹⁹⁶

In addition to his concern that such a surgery would “certainly prove fatal,” Mitchell opposed the surgery on the grounds of the personal happiness of the twins. “They are so perfectly satisfied with their condition, that nothing renders them so unhappy as the fear of a separation by any surgical operation; the very mention of it causes immediate weeping,” Mitchell wrote.¹⁹⁷ Mitchell went on to suggest there is “good reason for this uneasiness” given his judgment that there would be “the most extreme hazard in any such attempt” and the sense that” even after cut asunder, they would experience much diminution of enjoyment.”¹⁹⁸ Shifting his argument from one of medical risk to the personal feelings of Chang and Eng on the matter, to the extent that Mitchell’s reporting was accurate, centers the interests and agency of Chang and Eng in making medical decisions for themselves.

What the public debate among professional medical men about the surgical separation of Chang and Eng suggests is an array of opinions, not simply a yes or no binary about the feasibility and appropriateness of cutting Chang and Eng apart in the early 19th century. The early 19th century

¹⁹⁵ Felix Pascalis, “The Siamese Boys—Homo Duplex,” *Morning Courier and New York Enquirer*, October 3, 1829.

¹⁹⁶ *Richmond Enquirer* (Richmond, Virginia), 10/29/1829.

¹⁹⁷ “Dr. Mitchell,” *Vermont Gazette*, published as *Vermont Gazette*. (Bennington, Vermont), 10/20/1829.

¹⁹⁸ “Dr. Mitchell,” *Vermont Gazette*, 10/20/1829.

medical debates over the feasibility and appropriateness of surgically separating Chang and Eng foregrounds alternative models that stand in contrast to the impulse to cut and surgical normalization that undergirds contemporary guidance on the medical treatment of conjoined twins. While the capacities and risks of surgery in the early 19th century and the capacities and risks of surgery in the 21st century differ considerably, such abilities beg the question of the appropriateness of when and how to intervene by surgically cutting conjoined twins apart. Surgical norms about presumption of intervention ought to be read in light of the 19th century anxiety about intervening and the deference to the subject to ask for the cut. Moreover, surgical hubris and the “separation anxiety” of the contemporary moment ought to be juxtaposed to the fully lived experiences of conjoined twins throughout history.

3.6 Deathly Conclusions

Warren concludes his account with a darkly pessimistic expectation about the twins’ future – an anticipated death. Warren suggests that while “their health is at present good,” it is “probable that the change of their simple habits of living, for the luxuries they now obtain, together with the confinement their situation necessarily involves, will bring their lives to a close within a few years.”¹⁹⁹ Warren’s assumption of the impending deaths of the twins is rooted in a both cultural and biologically ableist and orientalist assumptions of living in the world. What “luxuries” and what “confinements” Warren has in mind are not explicitly named but seem implicitly clear. Juxtaposing their “simple” Siamese lives with the “luxuries” of living in the United States, Warren

¹⁹⁹ Warren, “An Account,” 255.

assumes that the twins would be unsuited to the change in living circumstances. Without trying to romanticize the conditions of living the twins and their family faced in Siam or reducing Chang and Eng into agentless objects of pity, it is worth critically questioning whether the romantic characterization of American “luxuries” was realistically afforded to Chang and Eng given their exploited roles of servitude to the benefit of the Coffin family.

The rhetoric of opulence that attended the exhibitions of Chang and Eng would follow them throughout their careers regardless of the economic successes and failures that attended their commercial exhibitions lives. Moreover, Warren’s assumption of the “confinements” Chang and Eng faced, echoing his introduction of their lives under the governance of Siamese Royalty, here seems to refer to their physical conjoinment. Warren’s assumption that such natural confinement would drive them toward an impending death is reasonable from a statistical account of conjoined twins relatively shorter life span. Chang and Eng were, and continue to be, two of the longest living conjoined twins in recorded history. However, perhaps more of a risk to the health and wellbeing of Chang and Eng was their “confinement” by being joined to the Coffins who pushed Chang and Eng to exhibit themselves at unsustainable rates with little regard to their health. Confined not by their biological existence as much as their social and cultural situation, it is remarkable that Chang and Eng continued to find ways of resisting the conditions that expected and accelerated their deaths.

3.7 Conclusion

Critical Disability Studies broadly, and Freak Studies more specifically, have sought to draw attention to the ways in which conceptualizations of which bodies are considered “normal”

is socially and culturally constituted.²⁰⁰ In her critical intervention, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson argues the 19th century marks a shift in Freak Discourse from a rhetoric of wonder to a rhetoric of error, as theological explanations of the appearances of extraordinary bodies began to be displaced by scientized medical discourses.²⁰¹ In marking this 19th century conjuncture, Garland-Thomson highlights the co-emergence of medical models of disability with the rise of the popular freak show. This chapter complements Garland-Thomson's broad genealogy of 19th century freak discourse by situating the changes within the political, economic, and cultural contexts of the professionalization of medicine in the United States. Access to extraordinary bodies, such as Chang's and Eng's, were valuable resources in the efforts of professionalization of medicine, especially anatomy, because they enabled medical men to construct normative ideas of the body by defining it against those bodies which were conceived in error within a rhetorical framework of scientific expertise.²⁰² I offer a thickening of the description of this historical conjunction by closely unpacking the various rhetorical frames of enfreakment of the earliest exhibitions of Chang and Eng as the "Siamese Youths."

Joining scholars from fields such as Sociology and Anthropology, among others, rhetorical studies scholars of enfreakment are particularly situated to unpack ways in which communication is used to produce, reproduce, and resist the socially and culturally constituted notions of what bodies are conceived as "normal."²⁰³ In this chapter I have sketched some of the rhetorical aspects

200 Lennard J. Davis, "Introduction: Disability, Normality, and Power," in Lennard Davis (ed.) *The Disability Studies Reader 5th Edition*, (New York: Routledge, 2017): 1-16.

201 Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Introduction: From Wonder to Error—A Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity," in Rosemarie Garland Thomson (ed.) *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, (New York: New York University Press, 1996): 1-19.

202 Michael Sappol, *A Traffic of Dead Bodies: Anatomy and Embodied Social Identity in Nineteenth-Century America*, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002).

203 James Cherney, "The Rhetoric of Ableism," *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 31(2), 2011: <https://dsq-sds.org/article/view/1665/1606>. Rhetorical Studies is also a field that can itself be unpacked by the insights from

of enfreakment, including particular ways of speaking about, writing about, looking at, and touching bodies that draw upon, and reinforce, assumptions of what constitutes normal. Scholars of the emergence of the Freak Show in the United States have noted the ways in which the carnival barker's oral spiel to attract audiences to the freak tent, the staged encounter of paying to look at extraordinary bodies, and sensationalized show biographies of the performers sold as souvenirs alongside the performance, all often draw upon ways of framing bodies as something not quite "normal."²⁰⁴ In addition to these rhetorical dimensions of enfreakment that occurred in the emerging Freak entertainment industry of the 19th century, relationships and norms of touching, who has the right to touch and who is assumed to be obligated to be touched, are negotiated aspects of the rhetorics of enfreakment. As the likely apocryphal story of the "Siamese Youths" Philadelphia stage fight with a presumptively white male audience member may indicate, enfreakment is also a tactile bodily rhetoric that is informed by racialized and ableist norms and institutions that regulate touching. Despite norms and regulations, the rhetorical situation of the Freak Show was often more unruly than scripted. As Rachel Adams suggests, freak shows were performances that often confused the "anticipated order of things."²⁰⁵ Rhetorics of enfreakment is suggestive of more than bodies being framed. It is clear that Chang and Eng were not docile, but curious and active lookers at, and actors in, the society in which they had been made to arrive.

Rhetorics of enfreakment are not only multimodal and contested, they are intersectional. Whereas origin stories of the emergence of Critical Disability Studies have been admonished for its white origins, Freak Studies may be understood to have begun in a parallel cleavage between

critical disability studies, as Jay Dolmage demonstrates in Jay Dolmage, *Disability Rhetoric*, (University of Syracuse, 2014).

²⁰⁴ See, for example, Robert Bogdan who characterized the freak show as a "way of looking."

²⁰⁵ Rachel Adams, *Sideshow U.S.A.: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001): 13.

disability and race. Scholars often focused either on the enfreakment of extraordinary bodies or the enfreakment of racialized bodies, but also claimed freakery as conceptual equipment to think beyond narrowly accepted identity based conceptions of the self.²⁰⁶ Building from Cynthia Wu's efforts to bridge considerations of disability and race in Freak Studies, John Collins Warren's "Account" of the Siamese Youths is best be understood as a medical rhetoric of enfreakment that conflates and confuses race and disability in order to explain Chang's and Eng's corporeal deviation from an imagined norm. Specifically, Warren's Account is indicative of the ways in which early 19th century medical rhetorics of the body drew upon both teratological and phrenological sciences in order to establish a corporeal norm and classify extraordinary bodies as deviation from the white and able-bodied figure at its imaginative center. Moreover, 19th century rhetorics of enfreakment are not confined to medical discourse. From the earliest exhibitions of the "Siamese Youths" to paying American audiences concerns about their conjoined corporeality were coupled with orientalist discourses about race and nation. Enfreakment, then, may be conceived as an intersectional rhetoric that draws upon ideas of race and disability and circulated among various audiences with different receptions and uses.

Finally, rhetorics of enfreakment also circulate among various audiences, what I have termed here the entanglement of medical and popular rhetorics of enfreakment. Describing the rhetorical entanglements of medical and popular enfreakment highlights the ways in which meaning making circulates across and between the two fields. In this case, entanglement includes a mutual (mis)informing and distortion of scientific fact and popular knowledge, with the medical

206 For a canonical essay on the whiteness of Disability Studies see Chris Bell, "Is Disability Studies Actually White Disability Studies?", in Lennard Davis (ed.) *The Disability Studies Reader 5th Edition*, (New York: Routledge, 2017): 406-415. Cynthia Wu traces some of the particular parallel threads of Disability Freak Studies and Racial Freak studies, see Cynthia Wu, *Chang and Eng Reconnected: The Original Siamese Twins in American Culture*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2012): 5-9.

discourse having an appearance of objectivity. However, the medical appearance of objectivity was notably called into question as popular responses and questions exceeded available objective medical explanations surrounding the presence of conjoined bodies in the natural world. Meanings and identifications, valences and frames of emphasis, often shift ideas of enfreakment move between audiences. In this chapter I have traced the circulation of Warren's "Account" of his examination of the "Siamese Youths" as it appears in regional and national medical journals, how it is repurposed in the promotion of the traveling exhibitions of Chang and Eng for the paying public, and how it returns in a transatlantic network of stories and rumors that appear in letters written on behalf of Chang and Eng. The account Warren published with medical professionals in mind as his audience offers a sanitized set of representations of the "Siamese Youths" and offers the results of his examinations – looking at and touching – of their bodies in a technocratic language of scientific objectivity. Freak studies scholars have critiqued the normalizing models of disability and race which used sanitized descriptive representations and technical language to convey the results of their experiments on others' bodies that conceals their situated, partial perspective and investments in reproducing cultural ideas of corporeal differences and their attendant inferiorities.

Despite taking up the general scientific ethos of objectivity, Warren's account notably begins by recirculating an anecdotal frame of the "Siamese Twins" as offered by the ship captain, manager, gentlemen Abel Coffin and reflective of his own assumptions. While Freak Studies scholars have noted the ways in which medical discourses were recirculated to authenticate and incite popular interest in paying to gaze upon their extraordinary bodies, as Coffin did with the early promotions of the exhibitions of the "Siamese Youths," by recirculating Coffin's anecdotes to other medical men, both in his published account and by way of everyday rumoring

between medical men years later, Warren's account is suggestive of an exchange of rhetorics of enfreakment wherein popular discourses slip into the medical discourses of the period. It is this interchange of ideas about what constitutes a normal body between and among various audiences that makes the notion of the entanglement of medical and popular rhetorics of enfreakment critical to understand the nuanced complexity and tensions in the discourse in the 19th century.

4.0 Chapter 3: Aggrandizing Enfreakment, Monstrous Intimacies, and White Family in the Early European Exhibition of the “Siamese Twins”

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I analyze the first European exhibitions of the “Siamese Twins.” It was on this tour that Chang’s and Eng’s exhibitions began to shift from a predominantly exoticized toward aggrandizing enfreakment. The narratives of Abel Coffin as father-manager and Susan Coffin as a mother-manager are an important element of the aggrandizing narrative as their parental proximity and training has a representational civilizing effect on the staging of the “Siamese Twins.” My focus is on the complexity of the movement of rhetorical enfreakment of the Chang and Eng as the “Siamese Twins.” In the movement of the exhibitions there was space revision of the group dynamics of the show and the show narrative itself. I trace the “Siamese Twins” in movement across the Atlantic, the movement in the mode of exhibition from exotic to aggrandizing, and movement of the monstrous intimacies between public and private discourses of family.

I start with an analysis of a receipt of insurance that Abel Coffin took out on the bodies of Chang and Eng prior to their departure for Europe. In *Freaks of Fortune*, Jonathan Levy argues that risk management emerged in 19th century America “as the very operational and moral heart of both capitalism and a rising liberal order.”²⁰⁷ Freaks of fortune refers to the 19th century term for the tensions in managing the “sudden and utterly unforeseeable extreme turns of wealth in

207 Jonathan Levy, *Freaks of Fortune: The Emerging World of Capitalism and Risk in America*, (Harvard University Press: 2014): 2

either direction” that was connected to the emerging “economic chance-world of capitalism.”²⁰⁸ Levy suggests “Americans met the freaks,” those “economic events that came so fast and were so outsized that they could not be attributed to human responsibility,” with a “mix of both fascination and unease.”²⁰⁹ Thinking through the rhetorical significance of Coffin insuring the risk of traveling the bodies of the “Siamese Double Boys,” dead or alive, adds a layer to the signification of “freaks of fortune” as conceived by Levy. More than a normative response to the booms and busts of emerging capitalist markets, the sublime blend of fear and attraction within the racialized and ableist economics of the US and European freak shows in the 1830s suggests a more complicated story of management of risk and conception of freaks of fortune.

In second section, I will consider the written and visual representations of Chang and Eng in the earliest London prints of the “Siamese Twin Brothers” and their show biographies.²¹⁰ In the previous chapters, I offered the rhetorical concept *comparative enfreakment* to designate the oral, written, visual, and tactile modes of representing and performing extraordinary bodies. In this section, I pick up from my close reading of the earliest exhibitions of the “Siamese Twins” for medical men and the public in the Northeast of the United States. Arriving in London, the “Siamese Twins” joined a longer legacy of public exhibition of extraordinary bodies – exoticized and aggrandized.²¹¹ Analyzing the European tour in focus highlights how the earliest representations

208 Levy, 310. Levy defines “freaks of fortune” variously as “all of the sudden economic twists and turns, booms and busts, and ups and downs that were newly and inexplicably in their midst,” or, more elegantly, as “the economic chance-world of capitalism” (2).

209 Levy, 310.

210 [James Hale], *An Historical and Descriptive Account of the Siamese Twin Brothers, from Actual Observations Together with Full Length Portraits, the only correct ones, permitted to be taken by their protectors*, (London: Printed by W. Turner, City Printing Office, 96, Cheapside, [1829]. [Wellcome Library: Available at Closed stores EPB / P (Shelfmark: 52816/P)]. See also the 2nd issue: [James Hale], *Account of the Siamese Twin Brothers From Actual Observations: For Sale, Only at the Exhibition Room, Egyptian Hall, Picaddilly*, (London: Printed by W. Turner, City Printing-Office, 96, Cheapside, [1829.6894%2C0.3822%2C2.3446%2C1.1863]

211 Richard Altick, *The Shows of London*, (Belknap Press: Harvard University Press, 1978).

adjusted as the “Siamese Twins” traveled across the Atlantic and back to the United States again in the 1830s with adjustments in narrative and relationships.

Building from the rhetorical archive of the insurance receipt as emergent evidence of subjugation and self-possession, I follow a narrative thread of “family making” in the discourses promoting Chang and Eng as the “Siamese Twins” in order to understand the constraint they navigated under the management of the Coffins. I join other scholars, such as Ann Stoler, Laura Wexler, Nayan Shah, Lisa Lowe, Christina Sharpe, and others, whose work demonstrates the importance of the intimacies of desire, sexuality, marriage, and in particular family as inseparable from the imperial projects of conquest, slavery, labor and government.²¹² In an effort to unsettle the liberal ideal of intimacy as a privileged sign of domesticity, I hope to resituate this familiar meaning in relationship to the broader global processes and colonial connections that are the conditions of its production.

Here, the performance of “family” is reflected in the popular representations and narrative exhibitions of Chang and Eng and letters of the early managers of Chang and Eng Bunker. My suggestion is that these show materials and letters reveal some of the ways in which racialized colonialism is a family affair. Juxtaposing the claims made in the Coffins’ private letters with the public narrative of Chang and Eng as part of the Coffin family reveals the monstrous intimacies

212 Ann Laura Stoler, ed., *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Antoinette Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, eds., *Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

which suture together the Coffin family narrative with the inclusion of Chang and Eng.²¹³ Rhetorically positioning Chang and Eng as part of the family provides a veneer of paternalistic benevolence to the early commodified exhibitions while obfuscating the colonial conditions that undergirds their separation from their families in Siam.

4.2 White Family Making, Monstrous Intimacies, and Enfreakment in the early European Travels

4.2.1 Insured Risk and Steerage Passage: Lessons of Possessive Individualism, Ownership, and Enfreakment Aboard the *Robert Edwards*.

On October 16th, 1829, a day before their collective departure from New York for a tour through Europe, Abel Coffin took out insurance “on the bodies of the ‘Double Siamese Boys’ alive

213 “Monstrous intimacies” is cribbed from Christina Sharpe’s *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects*. I share Sharpe’s “intent ... to examine and account for a series of repetitions of master narratives of violence and forced submission that are read or reinscribed as consent and affection: intimacies that involve shame and trauma and their transgenerational transmission.”²¹³ Where Sharpe finds “A narrative of injustice and captive desires comes to be hidden in a kinship narrative of freedom or access to it” for many black post-slavery subjects, I found a parallel narrative in the public discourse and private letters of the early managers of Chang’s and Eng’s exhibitions. In drawing upon Sharpe’s work, I do not mean to simply conflate Chang’s and Eng’s positionality with that of the “post-slavery subject.” On one hand, it would be flatly inappropriate given the fact that Chang and Eng would become part of the North Carolinian slave owning plantation aristocracy in the 1840s and publicly utilized their ownership of black men, women, and children as a justification for their inclusion into white sociality throughout the latter half of their lives. On another hand, to simply suggest that Chang and Eng were enslaved is to flatten the complexity of racialized colonial domination at the turn of the 19th century. Chang and Eng, as we will see, were recognized as having entered into a “free” contract with Abel Coffin – a recognition not afforded to the enslaved subject, such as Millie-Christine McKoy. Rather than flattening racialized domination to a white/black binary, Leslie Bow’s characterization of Asian Americans as an “interstitial ethnic group” can help to continue to complicate our understanding of racialization generally, and Chang and Eng more specifically. While Chang and Eng often had to contest American assertions that they were in fact the property of their managers, following Lisa Lowe’s sketch in *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, their early lives and labor productively illuminate the ways in which the early 19th century marks an important convergence of transatlantic African slave trade and the expansion of “free contracted labor” in East India and China.

or dead.”²¹⁴ The receipt of insurance shows that Coffin paid \$3,333 to the American Insurance Company, one-third of the total “expected value” of those bodies as assessed by the insurance adjusters at “ten thousand dollars.” Coffin’s policy suggests an effort to manage the risks of the venture, preparing for the public exhibition of the “Double Siamese Boys” in life or in death. As an experienced ship captain, Coffin recognized the risks associated with traveling across the Atlantic.

The history of risk is a maritime history. “First synonymous with marine insurance,” Levy explains that risk was a mode of coping with the “perils of the sea” in the 18th century.²¹⁵ Coffin knew these perils well, as he had written to his wife of crewmates and passengers who had died on the waters and entire shipment upended on turbulent waters.²¹⁶ Perhaps this maritime history explains why Coffin took out insurance on Chang’s and Eng’s bodies. Perhaps, also, Coffin recognized “perils of the sea” were exacerbated by the medical discourse of enfreakment that predicted the immanent death of the twins.²¹⁷ Regardless of his motive, Coffin’s insurance receipt, as a rhetorical object, signifies a shared recognition that Abel Coffin had possessive rights to the bodies as commodities of Chang and Eng.

Early modern maritime formulation of risk management is the “product of a double commodification,” wherein the secondary financial commodity was the risk and was only legally recognized “if it maintained a relationship to a primary, underlying piece of corporeal property.”²¹⁸

214 Abel Coffin, “Receipt of Insurance,” October 16, 1829. [NCSA] Siamese Twins Collection, P.C. 916.1.

215 Levy, 3. “Risk was first synonymous with marine insurance—a financial instrument for coping with the uncertainty of transporting commercial goods across maritime space. Buying and selling ‘risks,’ long-distance trading merchants purchased from each other financial compensation in the contingent event that a ‘peril of the seas’ or an ‘act of God’ struck their long-distance voyages and destroyed their property. Risk did not then mean extreme peril, hazard, or danger. It did not refer to the immaterial fear of an undesirable event. Rather, it originally referred to something material: a financial instrument for coping with the mere *possibility* of peril, hazard, or danger.” (2)

216 Levy, x.

217 Levy, chapter 2.

218 Levy, 32.

The insurance receipt presumes Chang and Eng as corporeal commodities imagined as possessions of Coffin. Notably, it is not “Chang-Eng” that are insured as commodities. What Coffin insured is, instead, his stake in the enfreaked bodies of the “Double Siamese Boys.” As a rhetoric of enfreakment, the insurance receipt suggests that the “freaks of fortune” carries additional layered meanings in the context of the popularization of the freak show in the 19th century.

New York 16 October 1829

Capt. Abel Coffin Dr. to Peter Remsen & Co.

Paid Premium of Insurance on \$3333. & Ship
Robert Edwards from New York to London with
the privilege of landing in any port of the Coast of
England - on the Bodies of the 'Double Siamese Boys'
alive or dead. The assured warrant that in case
of death on board the Ship the bodies shall be
carried to the port of destination. The danger for
which Insurers are liable only excepted - valued
at Ten thousand Dollars - on one third of the
valuation. Policy to be proof of interest - a 1/2 % of + Policy
to the American Insurance Company 51. 24
the same. to the Union - - - - - ditto . . . 51. 24
the same. to the Ocean - - - - - ditto . . . 51. 24
Deduct 3 % for Cash . . . 4. 62
153. 72
149. 10

our Commission 1/2 % on \$9999 . . . 49. 99. \$ 199. 09

Paid for 1 Cask Molasses Rum 100 Galls
overproof 58 - 158 @ 40c. . . 63. 20

• Cartage of ditto 38

• 12 lbs Cohesive Sublimates @ 90c. . . 10. 80

• 3 bottles 56c. Bx 20c. . . 81. 11. 61

• 70 Sovereigns @ 4⁸⁵ . . 339. 50

Received in payment of the above \$ 613. 78

Capt Abel Coffin's Note payable on demand for the amount
with Interest for Peter Remsen & Co.
Charles L. Davis

Figure 4 Abel Coffin, “Receipt of Insurance,” October 16, 1829. [NCSA] Siamese Twins Collection, P.C. 916.1

In addition to paying for the insurance of the twins' bodies, Abel Coffin paid for other commodities as well, including molasses rum and corrosive sublimate, totaling \$613.78. In its itemization, the receipt enables rhetorical movement between Chang's and Eng's body recognized as a commodity alongside others; reducible through the ledger to an abstract exchangeable quantitative worth.²¹⁹ However, as an assemblage the commodities exceed exchange value, they extend the value of the show. Beyond capitalist risk management of commodities to the perils of the sea, the necropolitical economy of the freak show reveal the other commodities, the molasses and corrosive sublimate listed, as "embalming materials."²²⁰ In preparing to embalm Chang's and Eng's body, Coffin's choice to take out insurance on the body of the Siamese boys "alive or dead" reflects a clear market for the necropolitical extraction of value from their bodies on display in the emergent entertainment economy of the freak show in the 1830s. As Susan Stewart has suggested, for curiosity seekers "it does not matter whether the freak is alive or dead."²²¹ As a rhetorical

219 If Chang's and Eng's bodies are worth \$9999. And molasses rum worth \$63.20. How much molasses rum are Chang's and Eng's bodies worth? This is a rhetoric of exchange through abstraction marked in the form of a question posed by the receipt ledger.

220 Yunte Huang, *Inseparable: The Original Siamese Twins and Their Rendezvous with American History*, (Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2018): 72.

221 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993: p. 111. Exhibiting black women's bodies as racialized and disabled freaks, dead or alive, held interest among professional and popular curiosity seekers across the Atlantic in the early 19th century. Yvette Abrahams, for example, explains how Sarah Bartmann, a woman from southern Africa, was enfreaked as the "Hottentot Venus" and exhibited across European stages from 1810 until her death in 1815. After she died her body was dissected and publicly displayed, first on exhibition, and then in a museum in Paris. Her body was repatriated and buried in South Africa in 2002.²²¹ Benjamin Reiss has charted how blackness and death were commercialized by the would-be infamous P.T. Barnum in the 1830. Reiss charts the ways in which Barnum's ownership of Joice Heth, an elderly black woman whom he traveled and exhibited as the "161-year-old former nurse of the infant George Washington," has been deftly erased through Barnum's repetitive self-authorship – a white masculine self-authorship that erases the history of slavery in the emergence of U.S. popular entertainment. After Heth's death, Barnum renewed public spectacle around Heth's body by instigating and amplifying public curiosity in the feigned controversy around questions of authenticating her age through another round of invasive observations.²²¹ In both cases, white men extract of value from the public and professional observation and discourse of dead black female body. These cases offer lessons of the necropolitical economies of black female bodies that are reflected in comparative parallel to the case of the insured bodies of the "Siamese Twins" dead or alive.

object, read again, the insurance receipt offers complexity to the suspension of possessive individual rights of Chang and Eng recognized in themselves, in life and in death.

Perhaps Coffin's insured stake in Chang's and Eng's body was also part of his rationale for subjecting them to poor conditions over the month-long trip across the Atlantic. While Coffin, his wife Susan, and their show manager James Hale traveled first class as passengers of the *Robert Edwards*, Chang and Eng and Tien were stowed as servants in the steerage of the ship. A few years later, Chang and Eng wrote that they recognized this mistreatment on board and "had frequent occasion to complain to Captain Coffin of having very rough food and being treated altogether in a different manner to that which the rest of the cabin passengers were treated." They recalled being forced "day after day to eat salt beef [and] potatoes," while the "other cabin passengers" ate "fresh meat" and "other luxuries."²²² Whereas the insurance receipt materially represents the agreed logic of exchange of the risk management assumed in Chang's and Eng's bodies, the restriction to confinement in steerage offered a spatial lesson in their subjection.

When Chang and Eng brought the matter to Abel Coffin, he redirected their complaint by explaining to the twins that he had bought first-class tickets for them. Coffin claimed it was Captain Samuel Sherburne that required that the twins remain in steerage. "The table was too crowded," Coffin replied to the twins at the time, reassuring them that all would be well. It would be two years before Chang and Eng discovered the truth in a conversation with Captain Sherburne. Coffin had paid for Chang and Eng and Tien "as servants at half price" and Coffin "seemed perfectly satisfied" having never raised a complaint. It was upon finding out this "gross lie" that Chang's and Eng's separation from the Coffins can be clearly marked.

222 Letter from Chang Eng to Captain Davis, July 4th, 1832, p. 2. [NDCA] Siamese Twins Collection P.C. 916.1. [Correspondence, Charles Harris to the Coffins, 1832.]

In their call to separate from the Coffin's and become "their own men," Chang and Eng would write that they "naturally imagined myself as much entitled as any of the other passengers." Reading Coffin's insurance slip as a rhetorical object offers a bridge case to consider both the early modern conception of risk management of commodities navigating the "perils of the sea" in maritime commerce and the performance of masculine liberal individual freedom by assuming "risks" for oneself. While Chang and Eng were subjected to the master-servant relationship that was fundamental to the early modern maritime conception of "risk," stowed in steerage on their voyage to Europe, they would return to the U.S. two years later with a firm sense of the importance of assuming risk for themselves as a critical performance of liberal freedom.

Over the course of this chapter, I identify techniques and performances that Chang and Eng learned in their exhibitions with the Coffins as their staging moved from an exoticized to aggrandizing mode of enfreakment in Europe that offered them equipment to assert their equality with the other passengers in the language of natural rights. In the next section, I will trace an education in the performance of a particular masculine possessive individualism within the scenes of monstrous intimacies of the technology of the white family by attending to the changing promotional materials figuration of Abel Coffin as benevolent protector and a series of letters written by Susan Coffin to her children that offer a counterpoint to those public frames.

4.2.2 European Tour: Monstrous Intimacies in the Family Work of Aggrandizing Frames of "Siamese Twins"

4.2.3 From Exotic to Aggrandizing

Popular and academic writing has emphasized the changing modes of enfreakment of Chang and Eng as the "Siamese Twins" over the course of their lives. In his foundational sketch

of the “exotic” and “aggrandizing” modes of representations of human oddities in the freak show, Robert Bogdan argues for the importance of understanding the complexity in the modes of presentation. Bogdan argues that these “true life” pamphlets sold alongside the exhibition were an essential component of the rhetorical enfreakment of bodies in the 19th century freak show. “Filled with exaggeration, fabrications, and out-and-out lies,” Bogdan argues “the stories were part and parcel of the freak image which the managers, promoters, and freaks themselves wanted to promulgate.”²²³ In the case of Chang and Eng, for example, Bogdan notes that the “mode of presentation changed to fit the changing characteristics of the person or the society.” Chang and Eng were “first displayed with emphasis on their cultural differences, exotic dress, and habits,” and later, “after they had been westernized, they wore American suits and ties and flaunted the fact that they were married and had large families.”²²⁴ Similarly, Cynthia Wu traces the shifting representations and performances of Chang and Eng “from exotic spectacle to genteel respectability.”²²⁵ A clear representational movement of Chang and Eng from an orientalist frame toward an aggrandizing frame first occurred in this European tour.

223 Bogdan, *Freak Show*, 19-20.

224 Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988): 115-116.

225 Cynthia Wu, *Chang and Eng Reconnected: The Original Siamese Twins in American Culture*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012): 23-31.



Figure 5 Left Image “Chang and Eng the Siamese Twins, in an oriental setting.” Lithograph, ca. 1830.” [London]



Figure 6 Right Image “Chang and Eng the Siamese twins, one holding a book,” Lithograph, ca. 1830.

In many ways the representations of the Siamese in Europe picked up where it had left off in the United States, with an overtly orientalist framing of the twins as the “Siamese Twins.” Medical men verified the public concern in the curiosity through invasive medical exams and proclamations of their popular interest to even the most delicate of audiences. According to a show biography, Chang & Eng arrived in London on a Thursday (November 19th, 1829) and were “submitted to the examination of the most eminent professors of Surgery and Medicine of the Metropolis [London]” on the following Tuesday (November 24th, 1829). While the “submission” of Chang and Eng to the medical exposure is described as an agentless act, it was Abel Coffin, Robert Hunter, and James Hale who posed with the authority to submit Chang and Eng to those

exhibitions. In exchange, medical men of London testified to the incredible and legitimate curiosity of the twins' embodied presence. They speculated on the health of the twins, the potentiality of their separation, and the entangled curiosity of their bodily configuration – normalized by singleton and racial frames. Those testimonies recur as publicity in the show biographies written and sold for popular audiences. It is in that recirculation that the medical and popular enfreakment discourses can be most frequently read.

Medicalized enfreakment was coupled with an overtly orientalist and exoticized representational enfreakment of Chang and Eng. For example, the cover image of the early show biographies for the “Siamese Twins” each draw upon orientalist phrenological depictions of an “Asian Type” and an adventure novel setting of a wild elsewhere.²²⁶ Chang and Eng are illustrated with bare feet and their queues neatly arranged on their heads. Their bare feet are coupled with an exaggerated sketch of an exposed connective band conjoining the two together. Their faces are drawn with a phrenological tinge; their facial structures drawn in as overstated ovals and their eyes reflect an orientalist slant. Chang and Eng are illustrated against a jungle motif backdrop, with palm trees and other luscious plant life offering an orientalist setting from which their figure emerges. The cover images offer an exemplar of the orientalist enfreakment of Chang's and Eng's early exhibitions in Europe.

The cover images are coupled with Hale's cartographic construction of “Siam” as a dangerous and backwards elsewhere in the narrative of the show biography. *Historical Account* begins with a description of “the kingdom of Siam,” an exotically imagined other homeplace of the *Siamese Twins*. Reflecting a shared trope with travel/adventure novels and freak show

226 See “Chang and Eng the Siamese Twins, in an oriental setting.” Lithograph, ca. 1830.” [London?]: [publisher not identified], [1830?] [Wellcome Library no. 6579471i.

biographies, *Historical Account* starts in cartographic terms, rhetorically mapping the territorial boundaries (“situated between the Chinese and Burmese empires”) and coordinating “Bankok, the capital city of the empire,” in terms of its latitude and longitude (“latitude 13°N and longitude 101°E”).²²⁷ Hale’s use of the latitude-longitude matrix reflects the colonial imagination of the globe as a series of “blank squares waiting to be filled in,” providing the reader with scientific assurance that something exists there while the author goes about filling that imaginative space with orientalist fantasies.²²⁸ Filled with orientalist and monstrous others, figured by the distortion of image that introduce a reader to Hale’s narrative, the cartographic frame works as a technology of colonialist enfreakment.

Hale follows his geographic framing with his description of the political life of Siam, drawing upon orientalist and colonialist discourses of Eastern backwardness. Hale’s account of the Siamese King, living in seclusion with his “700 wives” and putting to death anyone who looks upon him, constructs Siam political culture as ignorantly superstitious, sexually immoral, and violently intemperate. Hale asserts “the government of Siam is probably one of the most despotic and cruel in the world.”²²⁹ Hale’s characterization of the political life of Siam is grounded in a single anecdote from Abel Coffin, his associate in managing the twins’ exhibitions at this time, in which he was witness to King Rama’s reportedly planned a cruel punishment for the prince of Laos “who only escaped ... by poisoning himself.”²³⁰ Unmarked, but structuring Hale’s account, is a romanticism of American democratic governance. As Allison Pingree notes, “not only is

227 James Hale, *An Historical Account of the Siamese Twin Brothers, From Actual Observations* (New York: Elliot & Palmer, 1831), 5.

228 Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1994): 114.

229 James Hale, *An Historical Account of the Siamese Twin Brothers, From Actual Observations* (New York: Elliot & Palmer, 1831): 5.

230 Hale, *An Historical Account*, 5-6.

patriotism employed to sell the twins, the twins themselves are used to sell democratic nationalism.”²³¹ In Hale’s account Siamese political governance, reduced to a single man and his insufficient masculinity, is set out as the foil from which American political life is valorized and the exploitative contracting of Chang and Eng is rendered into a gift. A remaining task is to name and unpack the techniques of maintaining and sustaining the aggrandizing enfreakment of Chang and Eng as the Siamese Twins. One of which, is the rhetoric of family.

4.2.3.1 Coffin Father: Narratives of the Civilizing Father-Manager

The earliest London print of the show biography is titled, *An Historical and Descriptive Account of the Siamese Twin Brothers, from Actual Observations Together with Full Length Portraits, the only correct ones, permitted to be taken by their protectors*. In the second edition the title is truncated to, *Account of the Siamese Twin Brothers From Actual Observations: For Sale, Only at the Exhibition Room, Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly*. The title shifts, removing the “descriptive” qualifier and the authenticating claim that the included portraits were “the only correct ones” and were “permitted to be taken by their protectors.” In the previous chapter I argued that the rhetoric of the *descriptive* account was presented as a neutral mode of observation, but when read against the colonial grain clearly reflects the biases of looking of the author and the cultural contexts of the exhibition. Similarly, I offered a critique of the recourse to the *correct* image as a problematic gesture of looking and defining that reproduces a normalizing gaze. In the rest of this section, I highlight how the second revision, “permitted to be taken by their protectors,” is a part of a paternalistic rhetoric that frames Chang and Eng as children under the authority of

231 Allison Pingree, “America’s “United Siamese Brothers”: Chang and Eng and Nineteenth-Century ideologies of Democracy and Domesticity,” In *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 94.

Abel and Susan Coffin and a discourse of monstrous intimacies that sutured Chang and Eng into a violent relationship with their protector-managers. The language of “protectors” illustrates how the framing of the relationship obfuscates domination and control.

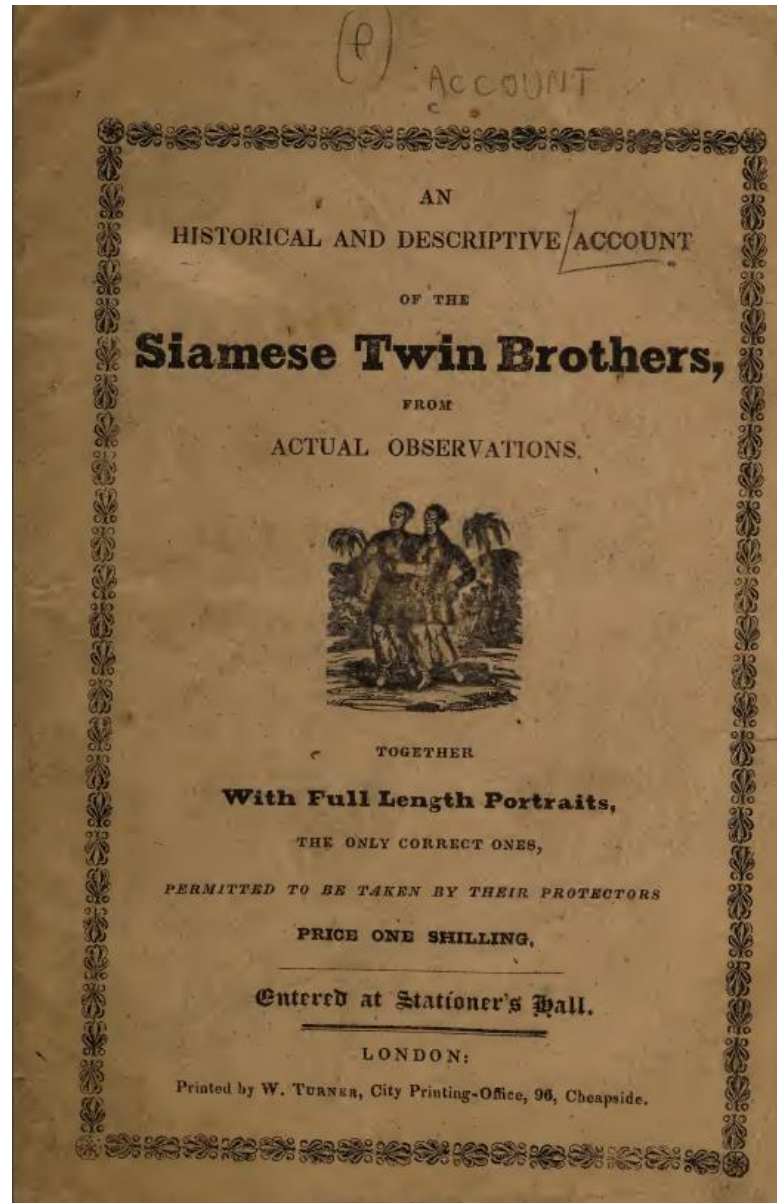


Figure 7 Cover. [James Hale], *An Historical and Descriptive Account of the Siamese Twin Brothers, from Actual Observations Together with Full Length Portraits, the only correct ones, permitted to be taken by their protectors* (London: Printed by W. Turner, City Printing Office, 96, Cheapside, (1829). [Wellcome Library: Available at Closed stores EPB/P (Shelfmark: 52816/P)].

Constructing an orientalist past (and present) from which Chang and Eng were saved by the benevolent American ship captain, Abel Coffin, Hale's narrative aims to incorporate the "Siamese Twins" into a recognizable American masculine political order by severing their connections with the imagined community from where they came. Hale labors to describe the benevolence of Coffin in bringing the twins to the United States for exhibition, describing him as a respectable protector of Chang and Eng and provider for their family. As Hale recalls:

They left Siam on the 1st April, 1829, under the protection of Capt. Abel Coffin, ... who had obtained the consent of their parent and of the government, to their leaving the country. The mother and children were equally pleased with the voyage, as a sufficiency was left for her support, and all were aware of the respectability of those in whose charge they were placed.²³²

I have argued the process by which Coffin contracted, and extracted, the twins from Siam, reflects patriarchal colonialist exchange logic as sketched in the first chapter. However, in this chapter I want to foreground the rhetorical work of constructing Coffin as a white fatherly replacement, providing the economic security for Chang's and Eng's family and taking responsibility and risk to look after the well-being of the children. In this paternalistic narrative is a rhetorical technology to obfuscate the colonialist, and exploitative, conditions that made possible their encounter in the first place. It is also an incredibly useful rhetorical maneuver to explain the progressive aggrandizing visual frames of Chang and Eng in ways that reproduce the white family as a technology of colonial subjugation.

Chang's and Eng's new suits of clothing, tailored in London shops and in a style of a young European gentleman, are the gifts of caring parent figures, Abel and Susan Coffin, and a key to the aggrandizing visual frame and performance. Chang's and Eng's intellectual development, their ability to play chess, converse in English, and even write in English, mark the lessons of white

232 Hale, *An Historical Account*, 8.

masculinization that were both everyday skills cultivated by Chang and Eng and performance props. Chang's and Eng's public image as the Siamese Twins shift from a predominantly exoticizing enfreakment to an aggrandizing enfreakment over the course of their European tour. I want to extend previous conversations about the complexity of the rhetoric of enfreakment by suggesting that the "family" is a key technology in explaining the narrative movement from exotic other to aggrandizing other, in which Chang and Eng were purportedly gifted with status-enhancing characteristics. This is the monstrous intimacy of the white family that brings the subjugated figured into the narrative channel of colonial assimilation through appropriate masculinization.

4.2.3.2 Susan Mother: Monstrous Intimacies in the Letters from Susan Coffin as Mother-Manager

A letter from Susan to her "dear children" dated March 6, 1830 is particularly instructive for understanding the boundary work of family making that the Coffins undertook during their early management of Chang's and Eng's exhibitions.²³³ Susan's letter to her children not only exemplifies the monstrous intimacies of white colonial family making, it is the most explicit record of the commodified exploitation of Chang's and Eng's performances outside of Abel Coffin's first letter at sea.²³⁴ Susan's letters to her children often spoke to the distress of being separated from them while rationalizing such separation as part of her responsibility to her husband and the long-

233 Letter, Susan Coffin to Abel and Susan Coffin, March 6, 1830 [p.2]. [NCSA] Siamese Twins Collection, P.C. 916.1. Correspondence, Capt. Abel Coffin, 1829-1830. Photocopies.

234 See chapter 1.

term benefit for her children.²³⁵ Susan's March 6th letter shares a similar sentiment, this time by way of an anecdotal conversation with Chang and Eng.

Your mother very often says to Chang Eng I want to see my dear Abel and Susan they say we want to see my mother brother sister. Chang Eng is very good boys indeed they say that they love your mother much. I tell them some times I am going home to America they say "No, No I shall cry mamah if you go home and leave me. [Y]our Abel and Susan got one good mother and uncle in America Chang Eng got none."²³⁶

Slowing to read this passage is instructive of the subtle maneuvers that suture together monstrous intimacies. Susan, writing through Chang and Eng in an orientalist broken English of sorts, first acknowledges Chang's and Eng's longings to see their family ["we want to see my mother, brother, sister"] alongside her own desire to see her children. However, only two sentences later she substitutes herself as their most intimate maternal attachment ["they love your mother much" and "No, no I shall cry mamah if you go home and leave me"]. Underlying Susan's anecdote is the very real separation of Chang and Eng from their family in Siam, a practice of domination that is sustained by Susan positioning herself metonymically as the displaced figure of maternal care for the "boys." In the juxtaposition between "Susan as mother" and "None" the concurrent dynamic rhetorical maneuver of colonial kinship separation and white family integration is rendered in absolute terms.

While Chang and Eng are made to speak of Susan as their loving mother, Susan makes clear that her maternal care does not extend equally to Chang and Eng as it does to her biological children, Abel and Susan. In perhaps the most explicit record of the Coffins' investment in the commodified exploitation of Chang and Eng Susan writes, "I long to see my dear Children though

235 See, Susan's letters to Abel and Susan Coffin on January 24, 1830; September 27, 1830 and December 28, 1830 in the North Carolina State Archives, Siamese Twins Collection, P.C. 916.1. Correspondence, Capt. Abel Coffin, 1829-1830.

236 Letter, Susan Coffin to Abel and Susan Coffin, March 6, 1830.

I don't know when the time will come as your Father has got these boys to earn money to send you both to school."²³⁷ Here, Chang's and Eng's labor is converted into the wealth necessary to exchange for the Coffin's white children to pursue their education. The costs of the tour, identified here by Susan as the longing of the mother separated from her children, are rationalized by an uncertain future projection of the benefits of economic security to educate their children and she further backs her rationalization, "I must stay with them and leave you with Aunt Batchelor and Uncle William and Aunt Betsy. I expect they will make you good boys and girls."²³⁸ The unevenness of colonial kinship practices is made further explicit as Susan, by way of Chang and Eng, juxtapose the privilege of Abel and Susan to rely on their familial network to take care of their children while they are away ["Aunt Batchelor and Uncle William and Aunt Betsy" would "make [them] good boys and girls"] whereas Chang and Eng, having been separated from their kinship network, would be left with "none" if Susan were to return back to the United States.

Before leaving Susan's letter, it is instructive to understand the familial juxtaposition not only between Chang and Eng and Abel and Susan, but also between Chang and Eng and Tien, the young Siamese man who signed as witness to the contract between Chang and Eng and Abel Coffin and was listed as a servant aboard the *Sachem*. If Chang and Eng represent the precarious position of the "tolerable ethnic" subject, the Coffins' mistreatment of Tien exemplifies the colonial disposability of others. Susan writes to her children: "Tien has been a very bad boy indeed I am sorry to say it of him. Mr. Hunter is to send him home. The boys won't speak to him. They say they cant believe he is such a bad boy. I hope I shall never hear such a bad account of my dear Abel."²³⁹ Whereas Susan describes Chang and Eng as "very good boys indeed," she derides Tien

237 Ibid.

238 Ibid.

239 Ibid.

as a “very bad boy indeed” without much way of explanation. While Susan does not relay what Tien has done to be perceived in such a way, she highlights the consequences of being figured as such. Not only is Mr. Hunter to dispose of Tien by taking him back to Siam, but Chang and Eng have also reportedly stopped speaking with him. With the ostracized disposal of Tien, the last individual connecting Chang and Eng to Siam is removed from the family scene that serves as a background for the commodified exhibition of the twins for European audiences. Susan closes the conversation by using Tien as a disciplining exemplar for her own son [“I hope I shall never hear such a bad account of my dear Abel”], using the example of the bad ethnic other to train her son in appropriate white masculinity.

4.2.4 Minding and Binding: White Parenting

By most accounts the England and Scotland exhibitions had been a financial success and continued to draw significant crowds. In an effort to maximize their notoriety a tour through France had been planned in the first months of 1831. A letter from Abel Coffin written to his children in late September directed future letters to a “Well & Green, Paris as we shall be there in two months.”²⁴⁰ However, the France tour never came to fruition. As late as December 28th, 1830, the trip to France was still an open consideration. In another letter Susan writes to her children she indicates that the next moves the group would make are “uncertain,” and that while “papa wish[es] to go to France” it is “not decided what to do yet.”²⁴¹

240 Letter, Abel Coffin to Abel and Susan Coffin, September 28, 1830 [p.2]. [NCSA] Siamese Twins Collection, P.C. 916.1.

241 Letter, Susan Coffin to Abel and Susan Coffin, December 28, 1830. [NCSA] Siamese Twins Collection, P.C. 916.1.

A popular explanation of this cancellation of the France tour on an emergent concern among French medical authorities that the public display of extraordinary bodies would have a deleterious impact on maternal health.²⁴² While I have not found any primary source material to back this claim, there is evidence that a resurgence of concern about maternal imprinting was finding vocal circulation in some medical journals in France around this time. Maternal imprinting, a theory that what a pregnant woman views would be imprinted on their child, had been used to justify restricting the public display of extraordinary bodies and especially the restrictions on women's rights to view such performances.

While it is possible that the medical authorities in France shut down the exhibition, I think it is as likely that Abel Coffin's business interests in East Asia and Susan Coffin's desire to return to home circumscribed the effort to extend the exhibition tour. Susan makes her feelings clear to her children when she writes in that same letter. "I long to come home," she writes affectionately to her children.²⁴³ With the France tour officially cancelled, Susan, Chang and Eng, and Hale boarded from London back to New York. On the return trip Chang and Eng were not held in steerage as servants. However, the aggrandizing frame that had been cultivated in Chang's and Eng's European exhibitions would be unsettled again as they returned to tour the East Coast of the United States.

In a letter written to his children shortly after Christmas in 1830, Abel Coffin writes that he is "going to the East Indias and expect[s] to be gone about one year" and to expect their "dear mother & Chang-Eng" to return in the new couple of months.²⁴⁴ He instructs his children: "I hope

²⁴² See Wallace and Wallace, *The Two*, 1978.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Letter, Abel Coffin to Abel and Susan Coffin, December 28, 1830. [NCSA] Siamese Twins Collection, P.C. 916.1. Correspondence, Capt. Abel Coffin, 1829-1830. Photocopies.

you will try and comfort your mother and by your good behavior compensate in part for my absence for I am going to get something to pay for your education for which I only ask your good behavior and attention to your studies.” He cautions Abel and Susan to “be careful in your company” and particularly warns Susan “for a young lady that keeps bad company is never respected.” Abel Coffin’s appeal to education as a primary good is a mark of class status and his particular warning to Susan is a gendered practice of child rearing.

In a letter to Susan written shortly after she returned to Newburyport, Abel extends the familial paternalism that had been identified in the show biography. He instructs Susan to “be kind to Chang Eng,” but warns her that she must “not let them have their own head [and that] it is necessary to have them mind you.”²⁴⁵ Abel’s message to Susan is to occupy the position of the kind maternal figure and yet to balance that with a stern control over their autonomy of thought. What is new in Abel’s letter this time is his acknowledgement that Chang and Eng may have perceived his paternal control in a negative light. In closing his letter he writes: “Give my respect to Mr. Hale and my love to Chang Eng. Tell them although they might think I was hard with them I think their own good sense will convince them that I have never done anything but what is for their good ... and that I feel that I shall always do by them as by my own children.”²⁴⁶ In some sense it does seem as though Abel Coffin does believe that he has done by Chang and Eng the same as to Abel and Susan insofar as he does express a religiously inspired paternal discipline across each of the figures. However, it requires a level of cognitive dissonance to understand a simple equivalence between the treatment between them each given the public exhibitions and call to refuse their “head of their own.”

245 Letter, Abel Coffin to Susan Coffin, January 8, 1832. [NCSA] Siamese Twins Collection, P.C. 916.1. Correspondence, Capt. Abel Coffin, 1831-1833, 1929, n.d. Photocopies.

246 Ibid.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter contributes to discussions of Chang's and Eng's lives and exhibitions and associated conversations around rhetoric, race, disability, and enfreakment. I contribute a thicker description of the conceptual complexity of Chang's and Eng's exhibitions across exotic and aggrandizing modes of enfreakment in the 1830s. Tracing the movements in the modes of enfreakment alongside the movements from the United States to England and Scotland and back to the U.S. draws our attention to the rhetorical techniques of shifting frames to meet changing contexts and audiences.

"Americanization" of Chang's and Eng's life story has minimized the impact of their first tour in Europe (1829-1830) had on their public exhibitions and eventual choice to separate from the Coffins and go out on their own. In the context of Chang and Eng scholarship there has been a clear entanglement with 19th century American Studies. Joseph Orser, for example, situates Chang and Eng "*in Nineteenth-Century America*," while Cynthia Wu situates Chang and Eng "*in American Culture*," and Yunte Huang charts Chang's and Eng's "*rendezvous with American History*."²⁴⁷ Given the extent of the effort to tell the stories of the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng, their first European tour is historically underexamined. Orser's otherwise incredibly meticulous history of the lives of Chang and Eng has a particularly American archival bias, and notably makes no reference to the collections of freak show memorabilia featuring Chang and Eng held in British collections, such as the Wellcome Collection. Marlene Tromp has already begun to

247 Joseph Andrew Orser, *The Lives of Chang & Eng: Siam's Twins in Nineteenth-Century America* (The University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 2014); Cynthia Wu, *Chang and Eng Reconnected: The Original Siamese Twins in American Culture*, (Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 2012); Yunte Huang, *Inseparable: The Original Siamese Twins and Their Rendezvous with American History*, (Liveright Publishing: New York, 2018).

highlight the limitations of the Americanist bias in freak studies and opened up space for the study of Victorian Freaks in British social contexts.²⁴⁸ However, even in that volume Chang's and Eng's European tours are not analyzed in depth. This chapter draws attention to the European tour as a critical space and place for the aggrandizing shift in the representations of the Siamese Twins.

Second, the role of Susan Coffin is closely examined. Abel Coffin's wife was not with the traveling tour throughout the eastern United States, but she played a prominent role in the European tour from 1830-1831. Over the course of the tour, Susan Coffin played an important role in sustaining the group. Her labor has not received much attention in the array of writing on the "Siamese Twins." Abel and Susan left their children, Abel and Susan, behind in Newburyport, Massachusetts under the care of their Aunt Batchelor and Uncle William. Abel and Susan's letters are an archival repository for understanding the Coffins' situation and perspective during the European trip. These letters also offer a differently intimate and interpersonal rhetoric than the public advertisements, promotional materials, and public reviews or debates in the news and among medical men.

In leaving their children behind, Abel and Susan's letters from the tour offer a textual means of keeping parental connections alive. In their letters, they both justify their absence from their children by means of suggesting the profits of the venture would support the family for some time to come. They send frequent reminders and lessons on how their children should behave along with books and other gifts that are offered with love. In their lessons, Chang and Eng are figured as goal posts for their own children's personal growth. This interpersonal letter exchange figures Chang and Eng as children tended to, but also extractable servants; a monstrous intimacy of white

248 Marlene Tromp, *Victorian Freaks: The Social Context of Freakery in Britain*, (The Ohio State University Press: Columbus, 2008).

family making that was inextricably linked with the aggrandizing enfreakment of the Siamese Twins performance.

In this chapter I take time to think through the ways in which American studies of the 19th century rely on circulation across the Atlantic by centering representations created and circulated in London and from their European tour. It matters that Chang's and Eng's exhibitions shifts from exotic to aggrandizing while touring in Europe because it complicates any easy sense that the "American Story," as many critics have suggested. Early American cultural dynamics were not constructed in narrow isolation from their recent dependence on England. From the perspective of this case study the circulation of curiosities, bodies included, back and forth the Atlantic opened space for shifts in public perceptions of the cultural status and interest of the "Siamese Twins." It suggests that Chang's and Eng's situation in American studies is filtered, in part, through their status as worldly travelers – in speech, in dress, in games, in company, and so on. This chapter began with Chang's and Eng's bodies insured as objects of risk and placement in the steerage of the ship and follows them through their complicated ascendance to social celebrity in Europe. On their return to the United States, Chang and Eng expected to, and were expected to, stay on deck. Facing a headwind of racist and ableist constraints, the lessons of aggrandizement learned in their European tour ultimately sowed the rhetorical seeds that lead to their separation from the Coffins. In the next chapter, I analyze the separation of the monstrous intimacies that conjoined Chang and Eng to the Coffins' authorities. In particular, I analyze how the prohibition on Chang's and Eng's developing a "mind of their own" broke down in the aggrandizing narrative and presented the exigency for Chang and Eng to assert themselves as "their own men" acting "under their own direction."

5.0 Chapter 4: “Their Own Men”: Separation Stories, Masculinity, and Racialized Colonial Enfreakment

Chang and Eng did not return to the United States as they had left. Coming to the United States from London, Chang and Eng, Susan Coffin, James Hale and the other passengers of the *Cambria* arrived in New York, where the group separated again. Robert Hunter reportedly sold his stake in the Siamese Twins venture while in Europe and traveled back to Siam. Abel Coffin took sail to Southeast Asia with merchandise headed toward Java. The plan was for Susan Coffin to return to Newburyport while James Hale and Chang and Eng continued their itinerant performances of the Siamese Twins throughout the major cities in northeastern United States, remitting some portion of the total profits back to Susan when possible. Abel Coffin conveyed confidence to Susan that Hale would “do everything you [Susan] wish as to his capability & honesty,” a point to which he sensed he had “sufficient proof” from his experience working with him in Europe.²⁴⁹ Despite Abel Coffin’s confidence in Hale to manage the exhibitions of the Siamese Twins in his and Susan’s wishes, over the course of the next year Hale, and then Chang and Eng, would separate from the Coffins management and control and set out their exhibitions under their own direction.

Most conjoined twins’ separation stories center biomedical and bioethical considerations of the feasibility and appropriateness of surgically separating twins from each other. As noted in the second chapter, the professionalization of medicine in the United States and its cross-Atlantic currents were captivated by such narrative dynamics. In these separation stories, the narrative

²⁴⁹ Letter Abel Coffin to Susan Coffin, January 8, 1831: p. 2.

begins from the view of the conjoined body as a problem, or anomaly, to be resolved through medical expertise and success is measured by the capacity to enable the invention of two individuals.

However, in the context of work on the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng, another separation story is iconic: their separation from the Coffins and decision to become “their own men.” There has been a tendency to write Chang’s and Eng’s history as a progressive “success story” that smoothly proceeds along a linear self-made man narrative. In this chapter, I intentionally aim to add texture to that narrative in order to unsettle the sense that this aggrandizing story was any smooth task. Calling for an end to their contracted labor with Abel and Susan Coffin and their turn toward possessive individualism offers the backdrop for the conceptualization of separation stories in this chapter. However, this narrative is more complicated than any simple story of the “subjected-turned-sovereign,” that has sometimes accompanied this narrative shift as evidence of the twins’ “success.”²⁵⁰ While the chapter may appear to move through a series of disconnected vignettes, the continuities and discontinuities that shaped the construct of Chang and Eng as “Their Own Men” is most clearly articulated in this less than smooth narrative form. I analyze an archive of letters, newspaper advertisements and articles, a diary, a contract, and printed public petition to gather a sense of the various materials that constituted the separation stories. In this chapter, I explore a litany of separation stories. My questions include: Who can dissociate from whom? How are associations and disassociations rhetorically constructed? Toward what political and cultural consequences? What do the breaks suggest to us about the nation, race, gender, ability, and class practices across America in the 1830s?

250 Irving Wallace and Amy Wallace, *The Two: A Biography*, (Bantam Books: New York, 1978): 139-176.

Separation stories offer a useful heuristic to understand rhetorical practices of association and disassociation and to consider the particular ways in which ability, nation, race, gender, and class are constructed in 19th century through such practices. Stevie Larson argues that Chang's and Eng's "oversized 'success story' does not square well with two disciplinary fields that emerged out of struggles whose interest was the liberation of the dominated and the colonized—not so much integration into any social formation."²⁵¹ Larsen situates Chang's and Eng's "integration" into American culture alongside Jasbir Puar's figuration of the "tolerable ethnic," where inclusion and assimilation is persistently contingent.²⁵² This chapter traces rhetorical practices of association and disassociation that constituted the work of navigating Chang's and Eng's oscillating inclusion and exclusion from American life.

This chapter analyzes the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng as the Siamese twins from their return to the United States in March 1831 through their separation from the Coffins declaration that they were "their own men" a year later. In the next section, I situate Chang's and Eng's return to the United States alongside American settler colonialism as a specific mode of domination structured by dispossession of land and elimination of natives alongside comparative associations and dissociations of Chang and Eng with American Indians.²⁵³ Arriving in New York in March 1831, the Siamese Twins performances were occurring in the cultural context of the Marshall court's construction of the "domestic dependent nation" category in *Cherokee Nation vs.*

251 Stevie Larson, "Making Exceptions: Rethinking Success through the Lives of the Siamese Twins," *Amerasia Journal* 39(1), 2013: 62.

252 Jasbir k. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007): 24-25.

253 Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the elimination of the native," *Journal of Genocide Research*, 4, 2006: 287-409; Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Lorenzo Varacini, "Introduction: Settler Colonialism as a distinct mode of domination," in Edward Cavanagh and Lorenzo Veracini (eds) *The Routledge Handbook of the History of Settler Colonialism*, (New York: Routledge, 2017): 1-8.

Georgia framed the legal sanction of the forced dispossession of Cherokee people. Chang's and Eng's associations with American Indians both in racialized and ironic terms suggest an uneasy fit with the "domestic dependent" liminality. Rather than suggesting settler colonialism supersedes other modes of domination, understanding Chang's and Eng's situated appearances as the Siamese Twins on dispossessed indigenous ground provides a prism to understand 19th century settler colonialism, slavery, and Asian indentured labor comparatively and relationally.²⁵⁴

In the section that follows that settler setting, I analyze the Siamese Twins return tour under the management of James Hale, in particular the contested effort to disassociate themselves from racialized and ableist assumption through the masculinist performances of speaking for themselves and fighting for their honor. The turn toward the aggrandizing enfreakment, which was marked by their associations with European social culture, and which was augmented by the brothers' ability to speak English and create their own associations in the language of their audiences. These were important turns in the inventive capacities of the Siamese Twins performance. Even so, white audiences did not always attune their perspective to those changes, as evidenced by the persistent newspaper accounts that describe Chang and Eng as exoticized others. In the second example, I conduct a close reading of the "Lynnfield Incident," in which Chang and Eng strike a white man while on vacation, to understand the various ways in which fighting for honor is sanctioned along

²⁵⁴ Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015). On the importance of a historical perspective see: Justin Leroy, "Black History in Occupied Territory: On the Entanglements of Slavery and Settler Colonialism," *Theory & Event*, Volume 19, Issue 4, 2016. I have relied on Jodi Byrd's notion of the arrivant as a capacious category to grapple with the messy relations the emerge from racialized colonialism. See also: Jodi Byrd, "Weather with You: Settler Colonialism, Antiracism, and the Grounded Relationalities of Resistance," *Journal of Critical Ethnic Studies Association*, 5(1-2), 2019; Cheryl Harris, "Of Blackness and Indigeneity: Comments on Jodi A. Byrd's 'Weather with You: Settler Colonialism, Antiracism, and the Grounded Relationalities of Resistance,'" *Journal of the Critical Ethnic Studies Association*, 5(1-2), 2019; Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); Robin D.G. Kelley, "The Rest of Us: Rethinking Settler and Native," *American Quarterly*, 69(2), 2017: 267-276.

lines of race, class, gender, and ability. In these first two sections, I texture the entanglements of settler colonialism in the Siamese Twins exhibitions within the transit of U.S. empire in the 1830s.

I next turn to a close reading of the first of two separation stories that braid together this chapter around the disassociation first of James Hale and subsequently Chang and Eng from the Coffins. In this first separation story, I analyze the separation of James Hale from Susan and Abel Coffin to mark the rhetorical routes of narrating this break up as a practice of Hale's honorable white masculinity recuperating himself from public insult by Susan Coffin whom he characterizes as "too independent a woman." Reading Hale's separation story closely sets the stage, and reveals some of the equipment for, narrating oneself into the world that appears in Chang's and Eng's separation story that would follow in the subsequent year. After the break with Hale, the Coffins' contracted Irish immigrant Charles Harris to look after the "concern." As Chang and Eng continued to exhibit, and navigated concerns with proximity to blackness and slavery, their narrative moved toward their own break with the Coffins.

After my reading of Hale's separation story, I follow the exhibition of the Siamese Twins through the winter of 1831 until their debut in Virginia in 1832. I closely analyze Harris' failed petition for exemption from a Virginia exhibition tax in the context white anxiety and rage in Virginia following Nat Turner's rebellion and consolidated in the 1831-1832 Virginia General Assembly debate on the future of slavery. While Harris attempted to appeal to the moral character of their business through his aggrandizing advertisements, the motion in Virginia turned on concern that Chang and Eng had been "bought" and "sold" by their mother to work for the profit of the Coffins. Haunted by the specter of slavery and associations with blackness, Chang and Eng were disturbed by the ways in which their status as dependents to the Coffins was public fodder

for discussion that, in their view, made a disassociation from the Coffins necessary to secure a particular self-made man narrative.²⁵⁵

In the final section of this chapter, I read Chang's and Eng's separation story. In a series of letters culminating in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Chang and Eng began to develop an argument for their separation from the Coffins and decision to go out on their own. Unlike in the biomedical narrative of separation stories, which tend to measure the success of the twins' separation based on periodic check-ins on the lives of the conjoined twins themselves, the separation stories from the Coffins open toward their claims of self-possession. Chang's and Eng's staging as the Siamese Twins was enmeshed with comparative associations with American Indians and enslaved black individuals in America. Taking their lessons of separation from figures such as James Hale, Chang's and Eng's articulation of themselves as "their own men" operating "under their own direction" was grounded on a disassociation with women, slavery, and colonial dispossession.

5.1 Indigeneity: *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*

Chang and Eng fit uneasily in indigenous critique of the "domestic dependent nation" conception invented in the 1831 Supreme Court decision *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*. Even so, associations of Chang and Eng with American Indians were part of private and public discourse in

255 For a consideration of the self-made man narrative as central to American cultural history that informs this project see Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). Kimmel situates Jacksonian Era hegemonic masculinity at the conjuncture of the shift from the figure of the Genteel Patriarch to the Self-Made Man. In a working definition Kimmel defines the Self-Made Man: "a model of manhood that derives identity entirely from a man's activities in the public sphere, measured by accumulated wealth and status, by geographic and social mobility" (13). While Kimmel misses the Siamese Twins in this narrative this chapter brings the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng centrally into this narrative arc of American cultural history.

1830s. Chang's and Eng's skin was sometimes compared in color and texture to that of American Indians, a racialized comparison that drew the brothers closer to the fixed colonial meanings of bodies. In another way, James Hale's colonial nicknaming of the brothers "Cherokee" and "Qui Hi" suggests that Chang and Eng were sometimes at an ironic distance in their associations with the American Indians.²⁵⁶ In letter written April 24, 1832, Hale writes to Chang and Eng: "Oh, you Cherokee rascals, if I had hold of you I'd give you a grip. I really want to see you very much."²⁵⁷ Hale also addresses "Charley and Qui Hi" in a letter written November 6, 1833 in which he later writes: "I suppose Cherokee that 'you've got so you can understand English pretty decently'— that remark is made to me daily."²⁵⁸ Chang's and Eng's liminal status as domestic dependents to the Coffins invites some curious comparison in effort to trace the transits of empire in the 1830s. However, what becomes clear is it is also important to texture what can be learned from social differences in a close study of liminal positionalities. If Chang and Eng were displaced arrivants in 1829, their participation in the process had changed in their return to New York from their European tour in March 1831.²⁵⁹

Just as the "Siamese Twins" returned to the United States changed men, they also returned to changed and changing nation. Over the course of the year, Andrew Jackson's presidency would undergo a series of public controversies, starting from a public dispute between himself and Vice President Calhoun over the Seminole war and eventually the dissolution of his cabinet following

²⁵⁶ In at least three letters Hale uses "Cherokee" and "Qui Hi" to address Chang and Eng.

²⁵⁷ Letter from James Hale to Friends Harris and Chang Eng, April 25, 1832. [NCSA] Thurmond Chatham Papers Historical and Family Papers, 1776-1955. Letters to and Notes of Siamese Twins and Dr. Charles Harris 1831-1844

²⁵⁸ Letter from James Hale to Charley and Qui Hi, November 6, 1833. [NCSA] Thurmond Chatham Papers Historical and Family Papers, 1776-1955. Letters to and Notes of Siamese Twins and Dr. Charles Harris 1831-1844.

²⁵⁹ Byrd's theorization arrivant colonialism offers a "way to account for the global contours of racialized gendered capitalism that deploys uneven and enforced precarity to interpellate voluntary and conscript involuntary participation into the structures predicated upon Indigenous dispossession and transatlantic slavery" (Jodi Byrd, "Weather with You: Settler Colonialism, Antiracism, and the Grounded Relationalities of Resistance," *Journal of Critical Ethnic Studies Association*, 5(1-2), 2019).

a wave of resignations.²⁶⁰ Jackson's violent policy and practice of Indian Removal had set one of the amplifying conditions of the United States that Chang and Eng were returning to.²⁶¹ In March 1831, the same month that Chang and Eng returned to exhibit in New York, the United States Supreme Court was grappling with the paradoxes of settler colonial jurisprudence in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* 30 U.S. 1 (1831). The Marshall court concluded that Indian tribes were "domestic dependent nations" whose relationship to the United States was "in a state of pupilage." Jodi Byrd argues "the legal processes through which [American Indian] liminality is enacted are tied directly to the removal of Cherokees from the South," which was rationalized by ruling on the legality of the Indian Removal Act.²⁶² Jonas Bens highlights the risks and potentials in Marshall case, arguing "the term *domestic dependent nation*, born in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* in all its paradoxical glory, is simultaneously a tool for legal discrimination and an opportunity for resistance against it."²⁶³ It is within this liminal and comparative context that a reader can understand what James Hale means when he concluded his March letter to Susan Coffin, "Qui hi [and] Cherokee send their love to Mrs. C," presumably referring to Chang and Eng.²⁶⁴

In March 1831, Chang and Eng were returning to the United States as dependents to the Coffins, a distinct space of liminality perhaps paralleling a condition of domestic dependent nation. Cynthia Wu argues "despite their Western-Style suits and props, such as Chippendale furniture, a checkerboard, and corded drapes, the image of Chang and Eng—still slant-eyed—within the space

260 Robert V Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars*, (New York: Viking, 2001).

261 Amy H. Sturgis, *The Trail of Tears and Indian Removal*, (Westport: Greenwood Press: 2007.)

262 Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011): 136. this liminality: "Since the creation of the United States as a political entity, American Indians have existed in as space of liminality, where what was external was repeatedly and violently reimagined and remade as internal in order to disavow the ongoing colonization of indigenous peoples that is necessary for the United States to exist." (Byrd, *The Transit of Empire*, 136)

263 Jonas Bens, "When Cherokee Became Indigenous: Cherokee Nation v. Georgia and its Paradoxical Legalities," *Ethnohistory* (2018) 65 (2): 247-267.

264 Letter James Hale to Susan Coffin, March 1, 1831.

of Anglo-American domesticity is one of dissonance rather than harmony.”²⁶⁵ In a note to support this claim, Wu writes, “the twins’ managers during this early period shows that they referred to them as ‘Cherokee rascals,’ linked them by dint of their racial difference to indigenous Americans, and the inexplicable orientalist nickname ‘Qui Hi.’”²⁶⁶ Orser also notes the ways in which representational “ambiguity that surrounded the twins—their race, their status, their positions,” shifted and changed over the course of their lives.²⁶⁷ For example, Orser suggests Chang’s and Eng’s skin was most often “compared in color to American Indians” in the 1830s and 1840s became described as “yellow” alongside anti-Chinese rhetoric in the 1850s.²⁶⁸ One of the historical traces of the “Siamese Twins” is a shifting and contested process of racialization by public comparison of Chang’s and Eng’s bodies and performances and other racialized groupings.

Wu comments that Hale’s use of “qui hi” is “inexplicable.”²⁶⁹ Jonathan Green’s *Dictionary of Slang* defines “qui-hi” in colonial Anglo-Indian contexts as the “usual summons to a servant,” or “a former colonial administrator or Indian Army soldier” and later an “English resident of Calcutta.”²⁷⁰ In mid 19th century it was used as a pseudonym in print on a volume considering the Bengal Army.²⁷¹ It is perhaps most likely an oblique reference to the early 19th century colonial graphic adventure satire, *The Grand Master; or, Adventures of Qui Hi? in Hindostan*, which could

265 Wu, *Chang and Eng Reconnected*, 25.

266 Wu, *Chang and Eng Reconnected*, 179n38.

267 “Were they Chinese or Siamese? Indians? ‘Niggers’? Enslaved? Free? Were they models of how to act, or how not to act? Were they a comedic device to poke fun at others, or were they the butt of the joke? Were they speaking for themselves, or were they ventriloquists’ dummies?” (Orser, *Lives of Chang & Eng*, 69).

268 Orser, *Lives of Chang & Eng*, 145.

269 Wu, *Chang and Eng Reconnected*, 179n38.

270 Jonathan Green, “Qui-Hi,” Green’s *Dictionary of Slang*, (ORO: 2011). The American Encyclopaedic Dictionary, Vol 8, (Chicago and New York: R.S. Peale and J.A. Hill, 1897) similarly defines qui-hi: “[Bengal. = who is there?] The local name for the English stationed or resident in Bengal, properly it is the customary call for a servant.”

271 Qui Hi, pseud. *What Is to Be Done with the Bengal Army?* By Qui Hi [pseud.]. England: Effingham Wilson, 1857, 1857.

have been a shared citation for Hale and his audience.²⁷² It is possible that Hale’s use of “qui-hi” to name Chang and Eng is an orientalist play on words that slips between Anglo-Indian colonial discourses and their own position as Siamese “servants” to the Coffins. Hale’s tone is playful, he does not mean such an appellation as an insult, but instead as a friendly jibe and manner of demonstrating a comfortable closeness with the twins expressed in teasing and name calling. Regardless of his tone and intent, the nicknaming Chang and Eng is a rhetorical choice that highlights the complex swirl of colonial constraint and freedom. Hale’s “qui hi” and “Cherokee” signature is a linguistic transit across British colonial India and American settler violence and back through the context of the “Siamese Twins” American exhibitions in the 1830s.

Noting the ways in which Chang and Eng made use of the ambiguities of racialization to position themselves in settler society is to contest their metaphorical assignation as “domestic dependent nation.” Even as Orser notes that Chang’s and Eng’s “freedom alone did not garner them respect, as they continued to be contextualized alongside embattled free people of color and American Indians,” he argues the “twins did not face the structural forms of oppression or abstract expressions of racism that plagued African Americans and Native Americans.”²⁷³ The metaphor between Chang’s and Eng’s status as dependents to the Coffins and the Cherokee to the United States risks easily repeating the conflation and reifying the racialization. Hale’s purposefully friendly use of “Cherokee” to describe Chang and Eng both demonstrates the slippery association

272 Quiz [William Combe?]. *The Grand Master; or Adventures of Qui Hi? in Hindostan*. London, 1816. Very little scholarship has taken this volume into account. See: Sen, Sharmila. “THE SARACEN’S HEAD.” *Victorian literature and culture* 36, no. 2 (2008): 407–431.; Christina Smylitopoulos, *A Nabob’s Progress: Rowlandson and Combe’s “The Grand Master,” A Tale of British Imperial Excess, 1770-1830*. [Dissertation]. 2011; Smylitopoulos, Christina. “Graphic Satire, Hudibrastics and ‘Missionary Influence’: ‘The Grand Master; or the Adventures of Qui Hi? In Hindostan’ by Thomas Rowlandson and William Combe, 1816.” *The British art journal* 8, no. 3 (2007): 39–46.) For images see: Thomas Rowlandson, *The Grand Master or the Adventures of Qui Hi? In Hindostan. A Hudibrastic Poem in Eight Cantos* by Quiz, 1816. Aquatint with hand colouring, 24cm x 14.7 cm. Posner Memorial Collection, Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA, USA.

273 Orser, *Lives of Chang and Eng*, 71, 62.

of Chang and Eng with American indigeneity and an ironic distance of colonial mimicry from the structural oppression navigated by American Indians.²⁷⁴ If Chang and Eng were colonial arrivants, “forced into the Americas through the violence of European and Anglo-American colonialism and imperialism around the globe,” in 1829, their position in March 1831 highlighted a changing set of ways they were able to function in settler society.²⁷⁵ Even as a domestic colonial masquerade that also suggests another way of thinking about relationships throughout the course of their travels and into the 1840s they assumed the role of American settlers.

5.2 Performing Masculinity: Siamese Twins Speaking and Fighting for Themselves

Chang’s and Eng’s separation stories can be understood through their changing performances of masculinity. In this section, I first analyze how their speaking in English works to establish them as intelligent gentlemen. Second, I turn to an incident of fighting for their honor as a complex performance of masculinity in what congeals as the “Lynnfield Incident.” Across these two cases – speaking and fighting – Chang’s and Eng’s personal performances of a gentleman masculinity is publicly contested and channeled.

274 Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” *Discipleship*, (Spring, 1984), 125-133.

275 Byrd, *The Transit of Empire*, xix.

5.2.1 Speaking for Themselves

Writing to Susan Coffin from New York on March 1st, 1831, Hale noted that the exhibition struggled to turn a profit in their first week back. Hale credited the poor showing to bad weather. “The weather has been very stormy here, since you left at times so that the walking is bad. We have not had forty ladies since we opened - they you know are our best customers, if we can get them,” Hale wrote.²⁷⁶ March showers had muddied the roads making it difficult for audiences come to visit, Hale presumed. In the gendering of the audience, Hale notes the bad weather’s particular effect on “ladies,” whose public movements were complicated by dress and whose roles as audience and customer was considered essential to the success of the exhibition.²⁷⁷ Hale’s promotional materials and the newspaper reports of the Siamese Twins exhibitions would continue to appeal to the imagined “ladies” audience, reassuring the reader that there was nothing offensive at the sight of such extraordinary young men. Regardless, in the constrained gendered economy of the freak show in New York in early March 1831, the “Siamese Twins” engagement at the American Theatre had only netted \$425 for 15 days’ work, only enough to cover room and board, while “other little items have swallowed up the rest.”²⁷⁸ In an effort to generate some extra income, Hale “sold the cast of the connexion (Bolton’s) for \$25, and got the money.”²⁷⁹ Always seeking to

276 Letter, James Hale to Susan Coffin, March 1, 1831. [NCSA] Siamese Twins Collection, P.C. 916.1. Correspondence, Capt. Abel Coffin, 1831-1833, 1929, n.d. Photocopies. (Emphasis in original)

277 Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, “Women Thinking: The International Popular Lecture in Antebellum New England and Its Audience,” in *The Cosmopolitan Lyceum: Globalism and Lecture Culture in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Tom F. Wright (Amherst: University Massachusetts Press, 2014).

278 Letter, James Hale to Susan Coffin, March 1, 1831. [NCSA] Siamese Twins Collection, P.C. 916.1. Correspondence, Capt. Abel Coffin, 1831-1833, 1929, n.d. Photocopies.

279 Ibid. The reference to the “cast of the connexion” is ambiguous. This is the only mention of “the cast” in the letters that I identified. I imagine that the cast was some variation on a mold of their bodies to be sent to medical men, or perhaps was used in the wax figure of Chang and Eng that was put on display sometime shortly after this letter. However, there are statuettes of Chang and Eng that were produced and sold, that could make sense as well. A few of them collected in the Wilson library display and they appear in public auctions occasionally, however, these statuettes all appear to be German made with the statutes inscribed “Saim Zwilling.” (See, for example,

maximize the extraction of value from their exhibitions, Dr. Bolton's cast offered Hale another layer of the material economy of the freak show.²⁸⁰

Hale's work as an intermediary reveals a lot of the details in managing the material inventions of the Siamese Twins. While they were in New York, Hale "had Caroline and Josephine here to overhaul Chang Eng's clothes." Hale also relayed messages for Chang and Eng to Susan Coffin. After noting Chang Eng were "well and desire to be remembered to [Susan]," he wrote that they requested she send them a "book about playing chess," their "4 blade penknife, in a morocco case," and "a bible." The material things, Chang's and Eng's possessions, their clothing, the book about chess, the penknife with case, the bible, all indicate their possessive individualism. The specific things signify a particular individualism, an intelligent, well dressed, Christian gentleman. The things can help to prop the men. In that same letter, Hale goes on to note that he had received the clothes for Chang Eng from Newburyport and that receipts were up. Hale also coordinated messages to Chang and Eng from others. In his letter from March 16th to Susan Coffin, Hale notes that "Mr Holyoke came on Monday and gave Chang Eng news from their mother, also a letter from her which has been translated to them they are now quite easy."²⁸¹ While the content of that letter from their mother and why it would need to be translated for Chang and Eng are not offered, the effect of easing Chang's and Eng's concern are relayed²⁸².

<https://auctions.potterauctions.com/lot-13498.asp>). Without knowing the details of "the cast" this example still shows the various materials that were sold for profit beyond the encounter with Chang and Eng, their photograph, or the show biography. Further study of the material culture and production of their exhibition would be useful and interesting. 280 Chang's and Eng's body is filtered through medical copy and resold to the public as a curious commodity. This is echoed in the public display of the last cast made of Chang's and Eng's connective band and liver from their autopsy in the Mutter Museum in Philadelphia today. See Wu, Chapter 3: "Strange Incursions into Medical Science at the Mutter Museum," 58-78.

281 Letter, James Hale to Susan Coffin, March 1, 1831. James W. Hale and Susan A. Coffin Papers, William L. Clements Library, The University of Michigan.

²⁸² One possible inference is that they could not read, even if it was their native language. Chang's and Eng's signatures on their contracts suggest they were possibly literate in their native language.

The weather gave way to a stronger showing in mid-March. For some, the return of the Siamese Twins offered an opportunity catch the extraordinary exhibition that they missed in their first run. Former New York City mayor, and avid diarist, Philip Hone, for example, took note of his trip to “see the Siamese boys” in March 15th having missed Chang’s and Eng’s exhibition from the year before.²⁸³ Hone, whose diary reads as a sketch of a slice of upper-class New York social life, described the brothers as an “astonishing freak of nature.” He wrote in surprise that “the sight of it is not disagreeable, as I expected to find it,” and described the “Siamese boys” temperament, bodies, and movements as “kind, good-tempered, and playful.” Hone drew together an orientalist phrenology to describe Chang’s and Eng’s faces as “devoid of intelligence,” with “that stupid expression which is characteristic of the natives of the East.” Having speculated that the “stroke of death” would “no doubt, lay them both in the same grave,” Hone concluded by noting that Chang and Eng “speak English tolerably well, and appear fond of talking.”²⁸⁴ If he had a conversation with Chang and Eng, those details receded into mere appearance of their enjoyment of talking. Hone’s comments show how some audiences may remain committed to one reading while the text is always changing.

For those spectators who had seen the Siamese Twins before they left the country, the show had been reinvented. New York newspapers registered two significant shifts in the exhibition of the “Siamese Twins.” First, their exhibition began to take note of the success of their tour of England. *N.Y. Gazette* reported Chang’s and Eng’s arrival, “happy to say that they have very much improved in appearance.”²⁸⁵ Chang and Eng returned to the United States a year older, dressed in gentleman’s suits, skilled at playing chess and other competitive games, and characterized by the

283 Philip Hone, *The Diary of Philip Hone, 1828-1851*, New York: Dodd, Mead and company, 1927.

284 Hone, *The Diary of Philip Hone*, 28-29.

285 “The Siamese Twins,” *Salem Gazette* (Salem, Massachusetts). 03-15-1831. Page [3].

cultural exchange of having travelled to England. In addition to their improved appearance, the *Gazette* relayed that “the trip to England has, as we learn, been profitable to those concerned.”²⁸⁶ While those concerned were not explicitly named, the profitability of the enterprise was recorded as a way of classing the record. Second, Chang and Eng were now conversant in English and conversation with audiences became a revitalizing appeal to return to the exhibition. The *Constellation* made precisely such an appeal to the New York audiences.

The excitement may not possess the novelty which it did on a former occasion but will, we think, be far more interesting from the circumstance of the twins being now able to hold a conversation with their visitors, and to answer some of the thousand and one questions which such objects cannot fail to prompt.²⁸⁷

More than the objects of description, Chang’s and Eng’s conversational English enabled the show to not only appeal to returning audiences, but it also gave way to new directions for Chang and Eng to present and define themselves. Conversation also enabled confirming details about the prominent separation stories that shaped the exhibition. For example, the twins are reported as dreading the thought of being separated from each other, denying the central premise of the biomedical separation story.

In another family separation story, the future reconnection with their mother became a part of the public discussion. *N.Y. Constellation* reports that Chang and Eng were speaking of their mother and their desire to visit her, a “promise, we are told, will be faithfully fulfilled” and “the Siamese Twins have the greatest confidence that it will be” as “those whose care they are placed” are held in the “greatest regard.”²⁸⁸ This promise would not be fulfilled. Yet, the *Constellation* ended its appeal to the audience through an orientalist opening that contrasts the extraordinary

286 “The Siamese Twins,” *Salem Gazette* (Salem, Massachusetts). 03-15-1831. Page [3].

287 “The Siamese Twins” *Newburyport Herald* (Newburyport, Massachusetts). 03-18-1831. Page 2.

288 “The Siamese Twins” *Newburyport Herald* (Newburyport, Massachusetts). 03-18-1831. Page 2.

character of Chang and Eng, especially given their births in Siam: “Were it necessary, we might relate many more instances of the nobleness of character exhibited in these youth, as we call them of a heathen land; but we leave the subject, with the re-assurance that the exhibition will abundantly gratify all who visit it.”²⁸⁹ The “heathen land” as receding backdrop to Chang’s and Eng’s aggrandizing ascension into first gentlemanly attire and then American self-made masculinity. As the Siamese Twins took to Philadelphia in April, Calvin Edson, the living skeleton, arrived in New York after a successful tour in Europe and assumed some of the New York public’s attention.

“The Siamese Twins” arrived in Philadelphia in early April. Hale advertised that they could be visited at the Masonic Hall, again making an appeal to the “kindlier sex” to come as audience without any concern for “false delicacy.”²⁹⁰ Hale, who had sent \$150 back to Newburyport from Boston, informed Susan Coffin that the group had “done very well” in Philadelphia, even if they had not had the draw of the year before.²⁹¹ He went on to explain that the Chestnut Street Theater “was announced for their benefit” and he received “half the receipts” from the night which was reportedly a “pretty good benefit.”²⁹² Chang’s and Eng’s appearance was advertised in the newspapers, although the event was announced for Mr. Lamb’s benefit, unlike Hale’s claim.

The Wonder of the World! *The Siamese United Brothers! Chang & Eng, for this night only.* Mr. Lamb respectfully announces to his friends and the public, that his Benefit and last night of the Winter Season, will take place on this evening, Saturday, April 9, 1831, on which occasion he begs leave to offer the following powerful attraction. In the course of the evening, the SIAMESE TWINS, *Chang and Eng*, will appear on the stage, accompanied by their conductor, who will explain to the audience the nature and peculiarities of this “wonderful phenomenon.”²⁹³

289 “The Siamese Twins” *Newburyport Herald* (Newburyport, Massachusetts). 03-18-1831. Page 2.

290 “The Siamese Twins” *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania). 04-07-1831. Page 2.

291 Letter, James Hale to Susan Coffin, April 12, 1831.

292 Letter, James Hale to Susan Coffin, April 12, 1831; [Headline], *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), 04-25-1831. Page 2.

293 [No Headline]; Advertisement, *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania). 04-09-1831. Page 3

Another communication of “Mr. Lamb’s Benefit” appeared elsewhere in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* that day. Signed “A Friend to Merit,” the author suggested that, if the announced entertainments, including the Siamese Twins’ appearance, were not enough inducement to “fill the house,” then the public should show up for Mr. Lamb himself.²⁹⁴ As Hale and others reported, the turnout seemed to have been strong. Perhaps this was also because there was not as much competition for entertainment on that evening, as the Arch Street Theatre advertised that they “will be closed for a few nights” as a “consequence of the preparation for the forthcoming novelties.”²⁹⁵

Regardless of why the audience had chosen to show up, Chang and Eng were scheduled to appear on stage after the performance of the 5-act tragedy *Adelgitha; Or, the Fruits of a Single Error* performed by a returning Mrs. Duff and before a concluding farce, *Catherine & Petruchio: Or, the Taming of the Shrew*, in Mr. A. Adams’ fourth appearance.²⁹⁶ As a novelty to punctuate and conjoin the other theatrical performances of the final showing of the Winter Season, Chang and Eng were to appear on stage with “their conductor,” presumably Hale, who was tasked with explaining to the audience the “nature and peculiarities” of the twins. In the context of this one-night only affair, Chang and Eng were enfreaked by another person, despite their ability to speak for themselves. In some ways the Chestnut Street Theatre appearance was an outlier in the exhibitions of Chang and Eng which had become more centrally an invitation to visit with the brothers in some rented public space for a fee. By the time they returned to the United States, Chang’s and Eng’s aggrandizing performances had done away with the medical observation and spectacular acrobatics giving way to conversation and intellectual games. On Chestnut Street,

294 “Mr. Lamb’s Benefit.” *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania). 04-09-1831. Page 2

295 [No Headline]; Advertisement, *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania). 04-09-1831. Page 3

296 For a rave review of Mrs. Duff’s performance, but that omits any mention of Chang and Eng see: PHILADELPHIA THEATRICALS.: MRS. DUFF. MASTER BURKE. *The Irish Shield*. A Historical and Literary Weekly Paper (1829-1831); Apr 22, 1831; 3, 14; American Periodicals pg. 233.

however, the public display and unfreaked explanation of their being was about being spoken for in this case.

Chang and Eng had not been feeling well during this stretch of traveling and exhibiting in Philadelphia. As Hale noted in his letter to Susan, Chang and Eng had “a small touch of their old complaint, the belly ache.”²⁹⁷ While he hoped it would quickly pass, Hale wrote “Chang Eng have been very ill” with a “touch of the liver complaint” having confined them to bed for 4 days under the doctor’s order.²⁹⁸ The debility of the travel and demand to perform had a compounding effect on Chang and Eng. They would later recall feeling forced to perform even when they were reasonably too sick to be working. Having been unwell and bed ridden for parts of April, Hale was happy to report that by the end of the month Chang and Eng “are now heartier than ever ... and “perfectly well now,” as he planned to move the group to Baltimore where it they “may anticipate a good business.”²⁹⁹

The group made their way to Baltimore where “The Siamese Twins” were “exhibited” at Fountain Inn, No. 7 Light Street for two weeks.³⁰⁰ The advertisement in the *Baltimore Patriot* began from the assumption that their interesting value for an audience has already been established: “Any comment upon them is deemed unnecessary as their credit has been fully established by the reception they have met with, from the numerous, honorable and renowned gentlemen in England, and also from our own most distinguished countrymen.”³⁰¹ Advertised as having just “returned from Europe,” the Siamese Twins interest is confirmed by effect of their having been audience

297 Letter, James Hale to Susan Coffin, April 12, 1831.

298 Letter, James Hale to Susan Coffin, April 23, 1831.

299 Letter, James Hale to Susan Coffin, April 23, 1831.

300 [No Headline]. *Advertisement Baltimore Patriot*, published as BALTIMORE PATRIOT & MERCANTILE ADVERTISER. (Baltimore, Maryland). 04-28-1831. Page [3].

301 [No Headline]. *Advertisement Baltimore Patriot*, published as BALTIMORE PATRIOT & MERCANTILE ADVERTISER. (Baltimore, Maryland). 04-28-1831. Page [3].

with other honorable gentlemen. A week later, the advertisement was adjusted slightly to include a headline “The Union Must Be Maintained,” a play on their extending their stay and perhaps their own conjunction or the conjunction of the union of the nation.³⁰² The Siamese Twins closed down in Baltimore in mid-May and turned back to Philadelphia before heading north.³⁰³ In their Philadelphia advertising the promotion wrote, “*and in order to be in unison* with the prevailing spirit of retrenchment” they would cut the costs of attending in half.³⁰⁴ In another reference to national context, Jacksonian reform and retrenchment in the economy, are used to tie their exhibitions to national political conversation.

Chang’s and Eng’s skill in conversing in English changed the dynamic of the business completely because they could speak on their own behalf as a demonstration of their intelligence against colonialist and racist dismissal. Even so, some white audiences willfully took note that Chang and Eng could speak English but were unphased in their phrenological description of Chang and Eng as lacking intelligence, as seen in the reflections of former New York mayor Philip Hone. Similarly, in Philadelphia, Chang and Eng were staged as props to be spoken for by their conductor, James Hale, on the theatre stage. Chang’s and Eng’s skill at conversing did not afford them the autonomy to craft their own stories, but it did open toward less predictable dynamics wherein Chang and Eng were contributing their own words to the conversation, and they were being heard by some other American audiences. Exhibitions as the Siamese Twins provided a space for public audiences to interact with Chang and Eng, but the brothers also faced public attention outside of the confines of the exhibition room. Attempting to take up leisurely activity

302 [No Headline]. Advertisement *Baltimore Patriot*, published as BALTIMORE PATRIOT & MERCANTILE ADVERTISER. (Baltimore, Maryland). 05-02-1831. Page [3].

303 [No Headline]. Advertisement *Baltimore Patriot*, published as BALTIMORE PATRIOT & MERCANTILE ADVERTISER. (Baltimore, Maryland). 05-13-1831. Page [2]

304 [No Headline]. Advertisement *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania). 05-18-1831. Page 3.

beyond the public gaze, Chang and Eng found that language was sometimes insufficient in asserting themselves and they turned to fighting for their honor as a performance of masculinity.

5.2.2 Fighting for Honor and the “Lynnfield Incident”

Fighting for honor was a contested practice in the management of gentlemanly behavior in a civilized society. Chang and Eng tested these boundaries in their altercation with a white man while shooting for sport in Lynnfield, Massachusetts. While shooting for sport as a practice of leisure signified upper-classed masculinity, at the conjunction with aggrandizing enfreakment the mere sight of Chang and Eng was “to the infinite amusement of the few of our citizens who accompanied them—who found to their astonishment that they were ‘excellent shots.’”³⁰⁵ This section analyzes the gendered, racialized, classed, and ableist dynamics of navigating who can use violence against whom and when.

By July, the travel and performances in the heat had become debilitating. Hale wrote from Boston to inform Susan Coffin that, after she had left, the exhibition planned to stay for another week had been changed.³⁰⁶ He explained, “I should have [stayed] but in consequence of the extreme heat of the weather Chang Eng say they are actually not able to keep up. They are well excepting very great debility and weakness.”³⁰⁷ Hale contrasted his own able bodied masculine intent, “I should have stayed,” by blaming Chang’s and Eng’s physical ability to continue on given the conditions. However, he is naming the “debility” that comes along with the conditions of the

305 “Siamese Twins” *Newburyport Herald* (Newburyport, Massachusetts). 07-12-1831. Page 2.

306 Letter from James Hale to Susan Coffin, July 24, 1831. James W. Hale and Susan A. Coffin Papers, William L. Clements Library, The University of Michigan. [2 pages]

307 Letter James Hale to Susan Coffin, July 24, 1831. [p. 1]

enfreakment of Chang and Eng; a wearing down, a diminishing bodily capacity.³⁰⁸ In response, Hale “thought that the best way would be ... to leave off for a few days, and go into the country.”³⁰⁹ A turn to the country from the debilitating conditions of the city and travel, Hale set a new course for Lynnfield, Massachusetts, which had been “recommended as a very quiet and [retired] place, and a healthy one too.” Writing his letter in haste in order to get it to the stagecoach preparing to leave, Hale closed his letter by inviting Susan and her children to join Hale, Chang Eng, Mrs. Hale and the Hale children for a week that “may be spent very pleasantly and in the end very advantageously.”³¹⁰ It is unclear if Susan Coffin and her children joined the group in Lynnfield, but the public newspaper reports of what would become described as the “Lynnfield incident” were certainly used to the advantage of amplifying attention to the lives of Chang and Eng.

In what is possibly an apocryphal story constructed as a publicity draw for the renewed tour of Chang and Eng, newspapers caught wind and set sail to a story that Chang and Eng had been arrested for “breach of the peace” while visiting Lynnfield. Chang and Eng were shooting in the woods adjacent to their hotel when Col. Elbridge Gerry and Mr. Prescott, in their “eager curiosity to catch a glimpse” of Chang and Eng, approached them in the field. William, the attendant or “boy” that Hale hired to look after Chang’s and Eng’s well-being for the summer

308 Jasbir Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017). There is a palpable debilitating wear of the travel and exhibition schedule the Siamese Twins group was keeping that is not often registered in the publicly printed archives of their exhibitions, but are often at the center of the letter exchanges between James Hale, Charles Harris, and Susan Coffin. Everyday sickness, accidents on the road, traveling in poor weather conditions, and a host of everyday lived practicalities are under-recorded in the public archive which is written and performed in a happiness track: The brothers are happy to see their curious friends!

309 Letter from James Hale to Susan Coffin, July 24, 1831. James W. Hale and Susan A. Coffin Papers, William L. Clements Library, The University of Michigan.

310 Letter James Hale to Susan Coffin from Boston, July 24, 1831. [p. 2]

requested the curious starers to give some distance and a scene of masculine bravado and violence unfolded in the ensuing encounter.³¹¹

[The] attendant of the Siamese, requested these persons to keep off, and by way of bravado threatened that, if they did not, the Siamese would fire at them. The Colonel opened his waistcoat and dared them or him to fire, but they did not—the Colonel then indiscreetly accused them or him of telling a lie—the attendant spoke to the Siamese about the charge of lying—they exclaimed, ‘He accuse us of lying!’ and one of them struck the Colonel with the butt of his gun—the Colonel snatched up a heavy stone and threw it at the Siamese, hit him on the head, broke through is leather cap, and made the blood flow—the Siamese then wheeled and fired by platoon at the Colonel who were horribly frightened.³¹²

Following the incident, Mr. Prescott made a complaint to Mr. Justice Savage and “they were taken before him and bound over.” The author opined that “many timorsome people in that neighborhood had got into a great fright. The truth, however, is that they are as harmless as kids, if unmolested. —There’s no danger from them, if they are not attacked by *Stone ’em* people.” The author shifted the blame from Chang and Eng by diminishing their threat by rendering them harmless children when unprovoked and places the blame on the classless curiosity staring of the people from the neighboring town of Stoningham. As Huang noted, the author concludes “the otherwise straight-faced narrative” with the irresistible “temptation to toss in a little gem of badinage: ‘It cannot be said to be any great hardship to the Siamese to be bound over, for from the day of their birth they have been under *bond*.’”³¹³ Newspapers circulated the story in part and whole, sometimes verbatim and sometimes with additional commentary. As was often the case, and would continue to be the case, in each encounter with the law, the public opined on the trouble conjoined twins pose for a

311 “Commonwealth Vs. Chang and Eng,” *Salem Gazette*, (Salem, Massachusetts), 08-05-1831. Page [4]. For a more comprehensive tracing of U.S. newspapers circulation and reprinting of reports on the Lynnfield incident see Orser, *Lives of Chang & Eng*, 213-218.

312 “Commonwealth Vs. Change and Eng.” *Salem Gazette* (Salem, Massachusetts). 08-05-1831. Page [4].

313 Huang, *Inseparable*, 113.

legal system grounded on possessive individualism.³¹⁴ If Chang is to be arrested for assault what is to be done with Eng?

Dated August 11, 1831 Elbridge Gerry wrote a letter “to the public” in response to the “misrepresentations having been published” and offering to “state the *facts* as they were, that those who will examine them may judge who was in the wrong.”³¹⁵ As Gerry explains the incident, he had stopped in at a Mrs. Spinney’s near the hotel to refresh his horse when he and his company, Mr. Benjamin Swain and Joseph W. Noble, heard that “the Twins” (whom he claims not have occurred to him to be the “Siamese Twins”) were out shooting and it was proposed to go see them in the fields. In a rhetorical inversion of movement and responsibility, Gerry claims his group of eight or ten people stopped when they came within 12 rods of Chang, Eng, and their attendant, who then “came towards us,” leveling accusations that they had been following them all afternoon and threatening to “blow us through.” Gerry, taking up position as the wounded party, remarked in defense of his honor that such a threat “ought not to pass unnoticed.” Instead, Gerry places the blame squarely on Chang and Eng who were constantly urging him [the attendant] to fire,” and the attendant who “was the origin and cause of the affray.” As Chang, Eng, and William passed by the group, Gerry remarked and repeated that they were all liars and “upon this their attendant struck me across the arm with his gun, and ‘the twins’ both fired directly toward me ... Immediately on their firing I threw the stone I had in my hand at the head of one of them, and hit

314 “Siamese Twins.” *Newburyport Herald* (Newburyport, Massachusetts). 08-05-1831. Page 2; “Philadelphia Lawyers.” *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), 08-19-1831, Page 2. Talk in newspapers speculated routinely: If Chang committed an assault, but Eng did not; how a court hold Chang accountable without wrongly punishing Eng!?

315 Elbridge Gerry, “To the Public.” *Salem Gazette*, August 16, 1831. P.2. Huang asserts Colonel Elbridge Gerry was a relative of Elbridge Thomas Gerry, “one of the nation’s founding fathers” and the namesake of “gerrymandering,” but the New London *Gazette* was “requested to say” that he “is not the Son of the late Vice-President, and in no way connected with his family.” (See Huang, *Inseparable*, 113-114 and *The Gazette*, (New London, Connecticut), 08-31-1831. Page [3]).

him as I intended. I was looking for another stone, and they hastened away.”³¹⁶ While Gerry remembers who struck him and where he was struck differently, his narrative of the events largely confirms those of the first account aside from a few details and the overarching moral claim to the right to defend himself.

Gerry went on to claim to have thought the “conduct of the three highly improper” and “deserved to be punished.” He ultimately “consented to the adjustment” of his complaint upon Mr. Forrester of Salem’s earnest solicitation and the “assurance of Mr. Hale their keeper, that he did not approve of their conduct ... and that he would be responsible that no such grounds of complaint should hereafter exist against them.” Notably, Gerry describes Hale as Chang’s and Eng’s “keeper,” trusting that his gentlemanly ways could civilize such animalistic behavior. A later account suggests that “Mr. Hale, for the purpose of preventing any injury that might arise to the exhibition from the rumor that they were dangerous persons,” paid \$200 fine to the Commonwealth as a way for the matter to be settled.³¹⁷ Regardless, Gerry concluded in his feeling, “that those papers which have given circulation to *witticisms* and reflectious [sic] upon [his] conduct, should be also ready to publish the facts as they occurred.” If Gerry’s intent was to allow the public to examine the facts of the case and come to their own judgment, “most editors ... are rather of the opinion that the gallant Colonel’s defense is somewhat defective.”³¹⁸ As with the first reports, most

³¹⁶ William was the attendant or “boy” that Hale hired for the summer. After Hale separated from management William was fired by the Coffins who hired a “gentleman” from Newburyport, Tom Dwyer. William and Tom’s work is classed and potentially raced. Tom, for example, was paid more than William and is described as a gentleman whereas William a boy. That Chang and Eng were dependents to the Coffins and Hale they were also gentlemen with attendants. Chang and Eng would send Tom Dwyer back to Newburyport when they decided to go on their own, presuming they could pay less for better work. There is more to these minor characters that get lost in the Siamese Twins story read only through Chang’s and Eng’s performances. As with Tiene who had been a “bad boy,” against Chang’s and Eng’s good behavior the work of these figures to associate and disassociate seem to be more important than I have afforded them attention to here

³¹⁷ Carlo. “The Lynnfield Battle.” *Baltimore Patriot*. August 20, 1831.

³¹⁸ “Siamese Boys,” *Connecticut Mirror*, published as The Connecticut Mirror (Hartford, Connecticut). 09-03-1831. Page [3].

reports described Chang-Eng as “perfectly gentle and unoffending, if not disturbed,” with some going further to note that “Mr. Hale, is a gentleman, who would not suffer them to do injury to anyone.”³¹⁹

Some went further to criticize and mock Gerry’s defense. In an article written after the conclusion of the trial, titled “The Lynnfield Battle” and signed as written by “Carlo,” the author offered their own statement of the circumstances of the event “as nearly and truly” as they could.³²⁰ Carlo’s account of the events is written from admitted bias, not so much out of friendship with Chang and Eng as much as having no respect for the character or manners of the *true* aggressors. Carlo resets the scene of encounter.

In the first place, while the twins were amusing themselves with shooting in the fields, attended by their servant, a lad about eighteen years of age, (Mr Hale being absent,) a mob of from twenty and thirty persons gathered about them, following them from place to place, and dodging after them in the woods. They repeatedly requested the people not to follow them, but without effect. They were as zealous as if in pursuit of a wild beast. This hunt lasted all the afternoon. About night-fall, as they were returning to the hotel, their followers began to insult them, calling them “*damned niggers*,” and using, in a most foul and disgraceful manner, opprobrious epithets in relation to their mother, which excited them in a high degree; and before any thing was done on their part, their pursuers cried out, “Let’s take away their guns and give ‘em a thrashing.”³²¹

Several aspects of Carlo’s resetting of the scene of encounter bear attention before the events of the incident itself with Colonel Gerry. First, Chang and Eng are framed as “amusing themselves” by shooting in the fields while being attended to “by their servant.” Chang and Eng are positioned as autonomous individuals, privately minding to their own amusement. Orser suggests part of the curiosity may have been in the perceived incongruity of Chang and Eng shooting game for sport, an “activity associated with men of means, signifying both masculinity and class.”³²² Chang’s and

319 “Siamese Twins.” *Connecticut Mirror*, 8-13-1831. Page [3].

320 Carlo. “The Lynnfield Battle.” *Baltimore Patriot*. August 20, 1831.

321 Orser, *The Lives of Chang and Eng*, 46.

322 Orser, *The Lives of Chang and Eng*, 46.

Eng's classed and gendered, and I would add racialized practice of shooting for sport, is also indicated in their positioning as men with a servant. Later identified as "William," this was another class distinction and inversion of the usual language of their early exhibitions or stowage in steerage.

Chang's and Eng's speech had no effect, or even a backfiring effect, with the white mob and in the breakdown of communication violence emerged as the solution. While Chang and Eng are framed as socially ascendant gentlemen, the curious audience is described in contrast as a "mob." While the whiteness of the mob is unnamed, the class of the group could not be reasoned with, the twins' requests to be left alone were "without effect." Carlo's description of the day long "hunt" of Chang and Eng by the "zealous" mob "*as if*" they were "in pursuit of a wild beast" is also suggestive of the failure of communication in the scene. Viewed not as gentlemen, but instead as racialized freaks, *as if* they were beast not man, the intensified mob would never hear Chang's and Eng's appeals. The violence of the mob moves between epithet and threat. Shouted down as "*damned niggers*," the blackening of Chang and Eng suggests the boundaries of whiteness being contested as would the Irish in the making of the American work class.³²³ It also suggests the curiosity seekers were galvanized by the attraction to racialized enfreakment. Carlo added inflection on the insult felt by the epithets directed at Chang's and Eng's mother, an amplification point, but one seized by the mob who openly threatened to "take away their guns" and "thrash" them. As Huang suggests, "such a mob scene foreshadowed the anti-Chinese riots that would run

323 Dale Knowbel, *Paddy and the Republic: Ethnicity and Nationality in Antebellum America* (Middeltown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1986); David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991); David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005); Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

rampant in the United States in the postbellum decades.”³²⁴ In re-setting “the first place” of the narrative of the encounter Carlo highlighted the atmosphere of rage, fear, and anger that shaped the encounter with Col. Gerry. From this perspective, Carlo suggests, any small discrepancy on details of what happened next should be understood.

Carlo concludes that Chang and Eng got the last laugh. He relayed that “an argument offered by one of the twins afforded much amusement to the Court. It was nearly in this form, and was addressed to Mr. Prescott, the complainant:

“You swear you fraid o’ me; you friad I kill you, shoot you—at the same time you know I have guns—you see I shoot you if I choose—and you keep round me, following me about—I ask you civilly not to follow me—you wont let me go away—you call me and my mother hard name—and yet you swear you fraid I kill you. Now, suppose I see a man in my country, in Siam—he goes out into woods, and sees a lion asleep—he say ‘Oh! I fraid that you kill me’—what I think of that man if he go up and give that lion a kick and say get out you ugly beast?’ I wish you’d answer me that.”

Carlo’s voicing of Chang’s or Eng’s “Siamese Logic,” as another paper described the argument, is both a defense of the natural persuasiveness of the truth of their claim and confirming evidence of their nationalistic differences.³²⁵ Some audiences again turned toward orientalism and humor to secure their critique of other white individuals and represented Chang and Eng as an “ugly beast,” even in their defense.

This example illustrates tension between Chang’s and Eng’s effort to have a private life in public. Even as Chang and Eng were performing masculine tasks in their private life as a demonstration of their gentlemanly ascendance, their private life itself was the grounds for curiosity by aggrandizing juxtaposition that attracted public attention. They could not enjoy their private leisure because their public appearances drew attraction. In their encounter with the white

³²⁴ Huang, *Inseparable*, 115.

³²⁵

mob, the turn to violence to defend their honor from being called liars also registered their masculinity. What is interesting is in how that performance registered in the public discourse as newspaper editors staged Colonel Elbridge Gerry's defense of his actions in a letter "to the public" and another response from a reported witness, Carlo, who skewers Gerry's behavior as classless white mob mentality. This public discourse in which white men defending Chang's and Eng's physical defense offered reasonable expressions of their honor from the blackening epithets used by the white mob works by separating themselves from *that* kind of white behavior. While they were ultimately fined for disturbing the peace, perhaps paid out of convenience to manage the reputation of the enterprise, the public discourse covering the story tended to credit Chang and Eng with having acted reasonably in the face of classless white curiosity gawkers. Even so, there was a curious colonial tendency to return to orientalist humor to secure their critiques of low-class white behavior and ensure separation from the Siamese whose ethnic difference is marked through comic relief of the tension.

5.3 James Hale's Separation Story: Whiteness, Masculinity, and Insult of Independent Women

Abel Coffin wrote again to Susan in April, noting that his trip to Batavia had been delayed and inquiring how her "marriage to Chang Eng" was going and how she and Hale "agree."³²⁶ In September, when tensions between Susan Coffin and James Hale escalated, he wrote to Susan again that he hoped it was "no serious quarrel" and that she had "got some management of the

³²⁶ Letter Abel Coffin to Susan Coffin, April 23, 1831.

concern.”³²⁷ He reiterated his belief that Hale “is the best person possible to be with Chang Eng for it he don’t behave well they will flog him.”³²⁸ Regardless of Abel Coffin’s confidence that Hale was the best man suited to managing the show, he was wrong to suggest that Chang and Eng would *flog* Hale for not behaving well, or, at least that they would rise to defend the honor of Susan Coffin as the matter would come to figure.

It seems that letters over the next couple of months between Susan and Abel were lost along the way, leaving Abel Coffin still apparently unaware that Charles Harris had taken on the role of caring for Chang and Eng on the road at the turn of the new year. He wrote to his wife again on December 25th, Susan Coffin the daughter’s birthday, hoping that Chang and Eng and her were “good friends” and to “tell [Hale] to be kind to them.”³²⁹ It seems only after Abel Coffin had written his letter to mark the new year that word of Hale’s separation from the group had reached him in Java. Before acknowledging receipt of the letter from Hale, he wrote to Susan to give “love” to Hale if he is with Chang and Eng.³³⁰ Abel Coffin’s confidence never explicitly waivered in Hale, even as Hale sought to separate himself from his obligations to Susan after an interpersonal conflict. Attempting to navigate his wife’s authority over Hale and Chang and Eng via a stuttering exchange of letters across the world’s oceans, Abel Coffin’s absence from the show complicated the communication between the group and revealed a gap between his own gendered expectations and the actions of the group.

Race does not appear in James Hale’s separation story as it does in the other examples in this chapter. This is not to say that race was not at play in Hale’s separation story, but instead

327 Letter Abel Coffin to Susan Coffin, September 2, 1831. (Emphasis in original)

328 Letter Abel Coffin to Susan Coffin, September 2, 1831. (Emphasis in original)

329 Letter Abel Coffin to Susan Coffin, December 25, 1831.

330 Letter Abel Coffin to Susan Coffin, January 1, 1832.

registers the ways in which whiteness could have operated as an unmarked center. Hale's separation from the Coffins offers a contrastive racialized lesson with Chang's and Eng's separation concerns, but he also models ways in which white masculinity may secure itself through dissociation with women while maintaining homosocial friendships.

On September 7th, 1831, James Hale wrote a letter to Abel Coffin admonishing Susan Coffin's insulting behavior and calling for a personal separation from her leadership of the "Siamese Twins" exhibitions.³³¹ It is in the honor of defending his wife, Almira, from insult, that Hale finds cause to write his letter of reprobation. According to Hale, Susan Coffin had been publicly and privately criticizing his management of the Siamese Twins. "That Mrs. C has insulted her [Almira] before me more than twenty times, is a fact, and I like a fool took no notice, because I did not wish to quarrel with the wife of my employer.—But it must be so no longer," Hale wrote in a breaking point.³³²

Notably, Hale admitted that his tolerance of his insult by a woman is initially entangled with his primary concern to keep his smooth relationship with her husband, his employer. Hale's letter is written as an expression of his manly feeling. "No doubt this letter will give rise to some unpleasant feelings but they had better be let out than remain feeling—as I felt that it would not become me as a man to refrain, therefore I have written," Hale explained.³³³ Hale's "no longer" moment emerged when he perceives that Susan Coffin insulted his wife *by insulting him* to her.

I do most sincerely reprobate her conduct in laying before her, what she certainly had no right to do to a wife what Mrs. Coffin was pleased to call my errors. ... She informs her, and that too when ill, "that I was not half the man I was when in England, that I could not attend to her bad mess & to my family also, and that Chang Eng were most shamefully neglected while in Boston, because she (Mrs. H.) took up so much of my time – that she

331 Letter, James Hale to Captain William Davis for Newbury Port, Mass, September 7, 1831. [NCSA] Siamese Twins Collection, P.C. 916.1. Correspondence, Capt. Abel Coffin, 1831-1833, 1929, n.d. Photocopies.

332 Letter, Hale to Davis, September 7, 1831. [page 2].

333 Letter, Hale to Davis, September 7, 1831. [page 4].

was at liberty to turn me away at any moment, and that if things did not agree strait, I very well knew the consequences.³³⁴

At the same time Hale relays Susan Coffin's insult, he was insulting her. Hale turned blame of any of his own short coming onto Susan Coffin herself. It was Susan Coffin's fault: it was *her* mess he was trying to manage; it was her demands on his times that causes any neglect in the care for Chang and Eng. "Now ... supporting all that she said to be perfectly true, which bye the bye I do not allow but allowing it for a moment, what right has she to [tamper] with the feelings of my wife in that way, or rather why so insult her, and under her own roof too?"³³⁵ Regardless of their veracity of the insults, Hale's compulsion to write his letter of reprobate and separation emerged from a sense of manly obligation to defend the honor of his wife who is to be protected from the insult of her husband.

Hale defended his work and his masculinity from insult. He refused the notion that he is not half the man he was England, suggesting instead that he is *double* the man in America. "It is damned hard, after completely [ruining] my constitution for her husband's interest when [I am] doing in the United States, alone, that which in England was performed by Capt. Coffin, myself and generally another, it is hard to hear [these insinuations], and to have my own wife insulted by them too."³³⁶ Not only is he taking on more of the work, he is doing it at the expense of his own health and for the primary profit of Abel Coffin, and subsequently Susan Coffin. Hale's heroic masculinity is sutured to the expectation of recognized honor for his effort.

There is a sexual wrinkle in Hale's separation story. Having laid out his honorific defense of his work against Susan Coffin's insults for two pages, Hale shifts to criticizing Susan Coffin's

334 Letter, Hale to Davis, September 7, 1831. [page 1].

335 Letter, Hale to Davis, September 7, 1831. [page 1].

336 Letter, Hale to Davis, September 7, 1831. [page 2].

public appearances and rumors of her impropriety. Taking on “an opportunity of doing” what Hale though was his “duty,” he had told Susan Coffin that there were “many reports in circulation which I thought injurious to her character and to mine too.” Hale explains, “It was thought strange that she should wish to be travelling about the country with me—meeting me at various places.” Independent women were shamed for imagined sexual impropriety, risked their honor in society, and lacked the good prudence to fall in line. Hale quickly refused the truth of the rumor, “these stories are very foolish,” but highlighted the difference of opinion between himself and Susan Coffin on braving the stories. “I should hardly think she would wish to brave public opinion but she says she cares not ... for the opinion of the world, that she’ll go when and where she likes.” Hale’s feigned concern for Susan Coffin’s character hardly concealed his own anxiety about sexual impropriety and the risks to his world by independent women. He advised Susan Coffin not to come to Portland, first suggesting that it was Chang’s and Eng’s request as they “had often said they did not wish her or any other woman to be with them” and second his own thought that it “better to silence idle tales at once.”³³⁷ Hale projected his assumption that Susan Coffin would not want to brave the public opinion, perhaps more clearly revealing his own discomfort with not having the bravery to navigate those public opinions. Hale admitted, “Now this is very independent,” but questions if it is the “course a prudent woman,” a woman who “wishes to sustain an honorable situation in society,” would take.³³⁸ Hale found Susan Coffin’s independence threatening to his own character and shames her for such impropriety.

Hale’s separation story was specifically a separation from Susan Coffin. He crafted the dissolution with intent: “Our, i.e. Mrs. C & Myself, connection personally must be dissolved,” butt

337 Letter, Hale to Davis, September 7, 1831. [page 3].

338 Letter, Hale to Davis, September 7, 1831. [page 3].

he “hope[s] to have the pleasure of hearing from you [Abel Coffin] and often.”³³⁹ Hale aimed to maintain homosocial ties with Abel Coffin, hoping to always “be on friendly terms with him,” but not willing to “be ill-treated any longer by his wife.”³⁴⁰ Hale’s wish is that it be known that he was “no longer to be led by the nose by her.”³⁴¹ Hale’s separation story highlights enduring bonds of male homosociality as a companion to the separation of bonds with “independent” women. Hale’s continued relationship with Chang and Eng, and Harris who comes on as the next show manager, further exemplified the homosocial male bonds at the exclusion of women.

Hale left it open what action should be taken next. If Susan Coffin would not agree to do so, he would “return immediately to Newbury Port with Chang Eng ... at once on receiving a line to that effect from you—or I can [go on] as I may consider best for the interest of Capt C. just as you please.”³⁴² If Susan Coffin would agree to let Hale go about his work and remit funds when appropriate he would be willing to continue to do so. In a letter written a few weeks later at the end of September, Hale’s tone had changed. Having been stuck in the Northeast in bad weather, he wrote that the group was headed to Boston and wanted to meet, writing “as I do not feel that [I] can consistently travel much longer my health is suffering so much.”³⁴³ Hale wrote that he “should very sorry to leave them [Chang Eng] if you [Susan Coffin] could not get anyone who would answer the [task] as well as myself,” but expressed confidence that “no doubt we could make everything right when I see you.”³⁴⁴ Hale’s separation from Susan Coffin was not the end of his engagement with the Siamese Twins, as he kept a regular correspondence with Harris and Chang

339 Letter, Hale to Davis, September 7, 1831. [page 4].

340 Letter, Hale to Davis, September 7, 1831. [page 4].

341 Letter, Hale to Davis, September 7, 1831. [page 3].

342 Letter, Hale to Davis, September 7, 1831. [page 4].

343 Letter, James Hale to William Davies, September 27, 1831. [NCSA] Siamese Twins Collection, P.C. 916.1. Correspondence, Capt. Abel Coffin, 1831-1833, 1929, n.d. Photocopies.

344 Letter, Hale to Davies, September 27, 1831.

and Eng and helped to craft Chang's and Eng's eventual separation story from the Coffins and public account of their going out on their own.

Susan Coffin's efforts to keep closer track of the finances of the show may have been a response to the repeated reports of meager profits from the shows and rumors that Hale had left the brothers to fend for themselves. Perhaps Susan Coffin also found fulfillment to be engaged in a world of relationships that was generally restricted to men. In either case, her public management of the affairs of her absent husband was met with Hale's sexist attack on her character as too independent of a woman. Hale's disassociation from Susan Coffin specifically marked the gendered separation of relations, but it was also enabled by his unmarked position as a free white man who could enter—and separate from—contractual agreements as an autonomous individual. Chang's and Eng's own separation story from the Coffin's mirrors Hale's separation in their gendered criticism of Susan Coffin's character, perhaps indicative that Hale contributed to the narrative Chang and Eng crafted to articulate their case against the Coffins. However, it is in the context of race, slavery, and indentured status that Chang's and Eng's separation from the Coffins reaches its comparative peak.

5.4 Blackness and the Virginia Exhibition Tax Debate

While the details are unclear, at some point between late September and early October James Hale parted ways with the Siamese Twins and Charles Harris was hired to “take charge of the Siamese Youth.”³⁴⁵ Charles Harris immigrated to the United States from Ireland and seems to

345 [Agreement between Charles Harris and Susan Coffin regarding the care of the twins, Chang and Eng Bunker.] Coffin family papers (MS010). Historic New England Library and Archives.

have known James Hale who recommended him to the Coffins. An undated agreement between Abel Coffin and Charles Harris laid out the details of the agreement. Harris would be paid \$50/month as long as he was employed in the service of “attending to Youth.” Harris agreed to work “under the direction and advice of Mrs. Susan Coffin” and in “the interest” of Abel Coffin, writing letters and remitting profits back to Newburyport each week. Harris was also instructed to pay Chang Eng \$50/month in a second agreement, “between Abel Coffin and Chang Eng that they are to receive the sum of fifty dollars per month,” was written into the document. The contract concluded with Harris acknowledging and faithfully agreeing to “do everything [he] can to promote the Interest of the Concern.” In a distinctly darker ink, Susan A. Coffin and Charles Harris signed the document as witnesses. Notably, Susan Coffin was recognized as able to own and manage the commercial affairs in her own name while her husband was incapacitated at sea transgressed Massachusetts legal code that figured “women as economically, emotionally, and intellectually dependent.”³⁴⁶ Unlike the contract they signed in 1829 with Abel Coffin, Chang and Eng did not sign as witnesses to this agreement. Even so, within the terms of the agreement Chang and Eng were recognized as having the authority enter a contract on their own behalf and were rightfully due a wage for their labor.

Chang, Eng, and Charles Harris were joined by Tom Dwyer, an attendant who helped to serve the interest of the concern, and Charlie, their reliable horse that drove their carriage from one venue to the next. Keeping in mind this more-than-human assemblage that travelled under the banner of the “Siamese Twins” highlights the ways in which the exhibition was a complicated undertaking of people, animals, and machines traversing complicated environments and weather.

<https://www.digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth-oai:k643cb22t>

346 Joyce W. Warren, *Women, Money, and the Law: Nineteenth-Century Fiction, Gender, and the Courts*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005): 16.

In November and December, the group traveled the northeast making stops in Connecticut and New Jersey. In late December the group had an accident on the road, with their carriage turning over tossing Chang and Eng and leaving Charley, their horse, to run off in a scurry.³⁴⁷ Other than light injuries to Eng from the fall, the damage sustained was primarily to the chassis of the carriage. The physical travel throughout the winter took a toll of the group.

Part of the toll was on the costs of doing business. Chang and Eng sought to adjust the terms of their agreement with the Coffins to reflect those costs. In a letter written by Harris but signed by Chang Eng, they ask Susan Coffin to approve a \$3/week increase to cover the unexpected costs of maintaining their horse and buggy or offering that they would board Charlie for the winter and travel by rail. From the brothers' perspective this request was clearly reasonable. Susan Coffin's response, at least as re-presented in the letters written by Harris on the twins' behalf, was first silence and then an ambivalent suggestion that they do as they wish.³⁴⁸ In both cases, Chang and Eng were upset, asking Harris to relay their complaints. Harris, continuing to faithfully relay the travels of the group and remit profits back to Susan Coffin when appropriate, took note of the awkwardness of being asked to be the intermediary translating their concerns and failing to have a response.³⁴⁹ The exchange was an irritancy, as Chang and Eng felt the Coffins devalued the harsh conditions of their exhibitions and they were limited in conveying their feelings in written English, but it was not yet a cause for separation.

This dissertation will return to these difficulties of communication across written English for the brothers in their effort to write their own separation story at the end of this chapter.

347 Letter signed Chang Eng to Susan Coffin, December 22, 1831. [NCSA] Siamese Twins Collection, P.C. 916.1. Correspondence, Capt. Abel Coffin, 1831-1833, 1929, n.d. Photocopies.

348 Letter, Charles Harris to My Dear Sir, December 28, 1831.

349 Letter, Charles Harris to Dear Sir, January 7, 1832.

However, the group managed to get along exhibiting further and further into the United States South where they ran into new trouble with the Siamese Twins aggrandizing enfreakment centrally tied to sectarian questions of slavery and race. In this section I analyze the March 1832 Charles Harris' petition for exemption from the Virginia state exhibition tax presented by Harris and signed by Chang and Eng to the Virginia General assembly. In the context of post Nat Turner Rebellion Virginia, despite being of Asian descent, Chang and Eng were associated with slavery and learned the importance of disassociation from blackness that pushed the brothers to conceive of their separation from the Coffins as a simultaneous re-narration of their lives as self-made men.

In August 1831, seven enslaved men engaged in a violent bid for freedom, making their way across Southampton County in southeastern Virginia killing every white person they encountered and picking up recruits from among the slave population along the way. At the end of the day fifty-five white men, women, and children were killed. By the end of the next day, white Virginians captured and killed nearly every rebel involved. White anxiety and amplified public discourse around widespread slave conspiracy circulated. Several enslaved black men in Virginia and North Carolina were put on trial, many executed, including Nat Turner whose hunt, capture, trail, and execution became a national spectacle.³⁵⁰

In the wake the rebellion, the Virginia General Assembly convened in December of 1831 to consider a range of petitions relating to the role slavery in the state moving forward. The 1831-1832 debates in the Virginia House of Representatives and February received national attention as they considered enacting laws that would gradually end slavery, reduce the number of free African Americans in the state, or strengthen controls over slaves. In the final vote, the legislature voted to

350 Patrick H. Breen, *The Land Shall Be Deluged with Blood: A New History of the Nat Turner Revolt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); <https://www.natturnerproject.org/the-documents>.

curtail slaves' privileges and put their efforts into exploring ways of ridding Virginia of the free blacks whom many whites argued set a dangerous example for those who were enslaved. Historian Alison Freehling argues the publication of Thomas Dew's pamphlet on this debate published in April 1832 marks the closing of public discussion about the possibility of ending slavery in the Upper South and sets in motion the dissolution of the Union.³⁵¹ It was in this context of the intense white public debate around slavery and national unity that "The Siamese Twins" debuted in Virginia.

The group arrived in Richmond in March 1832, following a relatively unsuccessful month-long exhibition route through Washington D.C., Alexandria, and Georgetown. Harris wrote more optimistically about their chances for good business in Virginia, suggesting the debut "began well."³⁵² However, the show ran into trouble when Harris was forced to pay a Virginia state tax on exhibition. Harris explains to Susan Coffin that "we are likely to be annoyed by having a law of the state enforced against us, which enacts that 'every exhibition of a show' shall take out a license & pay a fine of \$30."³⁵³ Worse yet, the tax applied to each county they intended on exhibited in making the potential of shows in smaller towns cost prohibitive. Orser notes that the tax on the Siamese Twins had been part of the tax acts in Virginia since 1813 and were renewed one week after the brothers' petition in 1832.³⁵⁴ In response, Harris "agreed to deposit \$30 in the hands of a gentleman of this town [Fredericksburg] to wait the issue of an appeal to the Auditor of the state revenue at Richmond who is the only person competent to decide whether the meaning of the act

351 Alison Goodyear Freehling, *Drift Toward Dissolution: the Virginia Slavery Debate of 1831-1832*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); Erik S. Root, *Sons of the Fathers: The Virginia Slavery Debates of 1831-1832*, (Lanham, MD: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2010).

352 Letter, Charles Harris to Susan Coffin, March 2, 1832. [NDCA] Siamese Twins Collection P.C. 916.1. Correspondence, Charles Harris to the Coffins, 1832.

353 Letter, Charles Harris to Susan Coffin, March 2, 1832. [NDCA] Siamese Twins Collection P.C. 916.1. Correspondence, Charles Harris to the Coffins, 1832.

354 Orser, *Lives of Chang and Eng*, 38. See Virginia General Assembly, *Acts Passed at a General Assembly*, 4-5.

includes us as “a show.”³⁵⁵ Harris concluded that he relayed “good hope of succeeding in getting the fine remitted.”³⁵⁶

Harris also wrote a letter to James Hale, perhaps inquiring about what strategies he had used to navigate such exhibitions taxes. Hale responded quickly, offering a note of consolation, “It is a miserable affair, and unprofitable without to be obliged to pay a duty or whatever it may be called,” before explaining to Harris a few thoughts on how to navigate the tax law. Remarking he had only paid the tax once in Dublin, and that all the New England states had a similar statute requiring exhibitions to be licensed, Hale noted “we never were expected to pay in a single tow – not even in rigid Connecticut.”³⁵⁷

I often had conversations with the magistrates who have said that no one would ever think of calling our business a show in the strictest legal sense – and I was always very particular to abstain in my announcement from the word “Exhibition” “being exhibited” or anything of like import. In fact no notice is given but simply that our young friends will be happy to receive company.³⁵⁸

While Hale’s advertisements did sometime refer to the exhibition of the Siamese Twins, as one advertisement cited earlier in this chapter shows, he did craft a narrative that actively sought to distinguish the engagement from a baser “show” or “exhibition.” Hale was not part of a freak show, he was the gentleman with his wonderful charge. Perhaps based on this history, Hale expressed confidence that the “reasonable request to be exempt from the tax” would be granted, especially if Harris “obtain[ed] the assistance of a few respectable men,” before offering another end around the tax as a backup plan.³⁵⁹ By the time that Hale’s letter reached Harris, the “memorial

355 Letter, Charles Harris to Susan Coffin, March 2, 1832.

356 Letter, Charles Harris to Susan Coffin, March 2, 1832.

357 Letter, James Hale to Charles Harris, March 18, 1832. [NCSA] Thurmond Chatham Papers Historical and Family Papers, 1776-1955. Letters to and Notes of Siamese Twins and Dr. Charles Harris 1831-1844(?).

358 Letter, James Hale to Charles Harris, March 18, 1832.

359 Letter, James Hale to Charles Harris, March 18, 1832. As a backup plan Hale recommended inviting friends to join Chang and Eng for “no charge for admission” but on the expectation they each purchase a book for 37 ½ cents.

of Chang and Eng, known as the Siamese Twin Brothers” was presented to the Virginia General Assembly.³⁶⁰

Harris’s memorial, signed by “Chang-Eng,” argued that the tax was “prohibitory.”³⁶¹ Harris argued the tax did not properly apply to their business. He explains, the aim of the tax was “exhibitions of Jugglers, Sleight-of-hand men & others who might corrupt the public morals of the Community” and other shows of the “same class.”³⁶² This was a good and just tax, they acknowledged, but not applicable to the Siamese Twins. As Hale had done before, Harris’ narrative of what the “Siamese Twins” was – if not a show, or exhibition – amplified a cultural exchange. Visiting with Chang-Eng, who are known as The Siamese Twin Brothers publicly, was an opportunity to be sociable with cultured gentlemen and shared appreciation for the wonders of the natural world. Nothing like such low culture performances, Harris contrastively defined the moral character of the “Siamese Twins” business as a social good. It was a dissociation with the ugliness of disability that would be codified in U.S. law later in the century.³⁶³ As evidenced by the gentlemen confirming their interest, the opportunity to meet with Chang and Eng afforded men, women, and children an opportunity to educate themselves while gratifying their curiosities. Harris was well prepared to craft this argument because it is iterative of an aggrandizing enfreakment narrative they had been cultivating since London. If Hale’s suggestion that the tax did not apply to their business was to fall through, Harris turned to an appeal of pity, arguing that the tax unduly hindered these “strangers in the land, far from their own home & laboring under an awful

360 “Memorial of Chang and Eng, known as the Siamese Twin Brothers,” Virginia General Assembly Legislative Petitions, Miscellaneous, March 12, 1832, Reel 236, Box 298, Folder 48, State Library of Virginia. See also Orser, *Lives of Chang and Eng*, 38-39.

361 “Memorial of Chang and Eng, known as the Siamese Twin Brothers,” Virginia General Assembly Legislative Petitions, Miscellaneous, March 12, 1832, Reel 236, Box 298, Folder 48, State Library of Virginia. See also Orser, *Lives of Chang and Eng*, 38-39.

362 “Memorial,” March 12, 1832.

363 Susan M. Schweik, *The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public*, (NYU Press, 2010).

disfiguration of the Supreme Being,” among a litany of other reasons.³⁶⁴ Aggrandizing enfreakment as grounds for exemption from the status of a “show” or “exhibition” tax law was being tested in the Virginia General Assembly.

Harris sent along a Richmond Paper with notice of the presentation of the memorial to the house of delegates.³⁶⁵ Writing to Susan Coffin from the Eagle Hotel, Harris suggested he was “doing all in [his] power to get rid of the tax” applied to the twins’ exhibition and “had a memorial presented to the House of Representatives of Virginia.” Harris conveyed an uncertain confidence that the appeal would be approved and offered a worth-a-try attitude about the motion, claiming that, “being respectfully worded it may do some good & cannot possibly do any harm.”³⁶⁶ As with Hale, Harris had the sense that their appeal was reasonable – it would be understood as such, and they would be on their way. After all, they had been marketing this narrative for two years now. However, this was their *Virginia* debut.

Writing to Susan Coffin on April 11th, Harris wrote to “acquaint” Susan for how the taxation affair terminated. He had been optimistic that his memorial would be approved, and the process started smoothly. The memorial was “referred to the committee on Finances who reported on it favorably” and “there was a decided good feeling in the House in favor of the Twins.” But when the motion came up for discussion “one member got up [and] dashed us all to the ground stating ‘that if the house consider themselves doing anything to favor the Twins by remitting the tax – they were quite mistaken, for it would only do good to some fellow in one of the Eastern States who had bought them of their mother.’ On this the memorial was rejected,” Harris relayed

364 Orser, *Lives of Chang and Eng*, 38-39.

365 Letter, Charles Harris to Susan Coffin, March 14, 1832.

366 Letter, Charles Harris to Susan Coffin, March 13, 1832. [NDCA] Siamese Twins Collection P.C. 916.1. Correspondence, Charles Harris to the Coffins, 1832.

the end of the matter in the Virginia General Assembly.³⁶⁷ In the Virginia political register the concern was not about the moral character of the show, but instead a problem of sectarian slavery. For the Virginia Assembly that argument was already established to hold the day.

After the memorial was rejected, Harris reports that “one of the members” relayed “all of the particulars of the speech in the House about their having been bought” to Chang and Eng which “has excited the bitterest feelings in their minds to think that their private affairs should have been made the subject of conversation so much as to have cause such a speech in a legislative assembly whose proceedings are listened to by so many.”³⁶⁸ Notably, Harris relays Chang’s and Eng’s excited feelings as a private concern. There are matters private to the gentleman that are not appropriately concerns of public opinion even as they are excited among the public. Their private narrative was made public, and while it was a public of their making through their appeal of the tax, it was not a paying public that they had generally encountered. This public insult, brought about by an attempt to avoid a show tax, was amplified for Chang and Eng whose excited bitter feelings turned into a “rage [that] knows no bounds” when shortly after a Norfolk, Virginia newspaper reported Chang and Eng were “sold by their mother to Mr. Hunter and Captain Coffin.” The ambiguous position of Chang and Eng, a liminal position in relation to the Coffins and to the nation was filtered through public discussion about how they were “bought” and “sold” that registered as sectarian slave stories in 1832 Virginia.

Integration challenges for Chang and Eng were constructed through rhetorical distancing from “exhibition,” positioning themselves instead as gentlemen “receiving company.” Hale and

367 Letter, Charles Harris to Susan Coffin, April 11, 1832. [NDCA] Siamese Twins Collection P.C. 916.1. Correspondence, Charles Harris to the Coffins, 1832.

368 Letter, Charles Harris to Susan Coffin, April 11, 1832. [NDCA] Siamese Twins Collection P.C. 916.1. Correspondence, Charles Harris to the Coffins, 1832.

Harris' assumption that the biggest rhetorical challenge that their business faced was their association with the cultural devaluation of Asian and disabled figures did not always hold up in public deliberations. The Virginia legislative assembly publicly read Chang's and Eng's petition and situation through a prevailing concern with anti-black anxiety as well as investigations concerning who is bought and sold and who profits from those exchanges.

The two incidents, the Virginia Assembly debate and the Norfolk news, did not surprise Chang and Eng as they did Harris. Chang and Eng had heard such matters several times before. What was worse was the liminal space between the truth and fiction of the case. Harris wrote that Chang and Eng said that they would "not have felt half as mortified" if "these assertions" were not "false" than if "they were quite true," and based on "real facts, but the mixture of truth & fiction is double provoking to them."³⁶⁹ Chang's and Eng's rage over the public discussion of their having been bought opened up a rift in their relationship to the Coffins as the brothers were presented with an education in the importance of disassociating from the perception that they had been bought and sold. Initially, Harris reported to Susan Coffin in a section of a letter marked ("private"), that her effort to assuage the twins' anger by sending Chang and Eng "Dr. Warren's statement" had "made them quieter" on the topic.³⁷⁰ It is unclear what Warren's statement included, but the calming effect it had on Chang and Eng quickly dissipated and the bad feelings Chang and Eng felt would be rekindled as the group prepared to cross the Alleghany mountains. Next, I examine Chang's and Eng's separation story and the case for their break from the Coffins they had it put to paper.

369 Letter, Charles Harris to Susan Coffin, April 11, 1832.

370 Letter, Charles Harris to Susan Coffin, April 30, 1832. [NDCA] Siamese Twins Collection P.C. 916.1. Correspondence, Charles Harris to the Coffins, 1832.

5.5 Chang's and Eng's Separation Story: "Their Own Men"

If Chang and Eng seemed assuaged about their relationship with the Coffins at the end of April, by the end of May their rage had been further intensified. In a series of letters written over the course of their passage through the Allegheny mountains, which I will analyze here as the "separation letters," Chang and Eng set out the case for their separation from Susan and Abel Coffin. Across dozens of pages, Chang and Eng offer a litany of criticisms of Able and Susan Coffin's characters. As Hale had centered much of his separation complaint to diminishing Susan Coffin, Chang and Eng similarly make gendered criticisms of Susan Coffin. Across both separation stories the anxiety around Coffin speaking out of turn in public venues recur as a prominent way of distancing themselves into their own more honorable masculine positions. We do not have any of the letters from Susan Coffin. Instead, these letters only reflect a construction of Susan Coffin and her positions through the refraction of Chang's and Eng's responses.

Chang's and Eng's separation story was mediated by Charles Harris's position as writer. In the first of a series of letters, Harris wrote that Chang and Eng were frustrated by the requirement to engage Susan Coffin through the inaccessible written mode. Harris writes, "it is very unpleasant to them to be unable to write all this to Mrs. Coffin themselves." However, they felt compelled to have a defense of their actions written for the record. Harris writes, they saw "no way of getting out of the difficulty but to submit to the imputations contained in [her] letter."³⁷¹ Nearly a month into the letter exchange, Chang and Eng again wrote of the annoyance of being "forced ... to write to you (by the hand of another person)" most particularly because it required that they make public many private matters which they would have happily left quiet, but for her letters being "so

371 Letter, Charles Harris signed Chang Eng to Susan Coffin, May 29, 1832. [Page 3].

unreasonable[,] I might almost say so insulting that in self-defense I was compelled to state many disagreeable truths & to write concerning Captain Coffin's private affairs as well as concerning his conduct to me [Chang-Eng] in a manner wanted only by the attacks made on me in your letter."³⁷² Harris acts as a translator in the conflict, holding together the conversation through his writing; sometimes voicing Chang's and Eng's opinion and sometimes his own, but always with some discomfort in being caught between the Coffins and the brothers in conflict. As a way of signifying that the letter reflected the claims of Chang and Eng they "asked to affix their signature to it to stamp it as their deed, their sentiments & their feelings" with their names signed in English: "Chang-Eng, Siamese Twins." In the context of their attempt to navigate their freedom in the colonial language of American English, Chang's and Eng's ability to converse in English met the limits of their literacy in reading and writing in English. Harris, however, seemed to feel obligated to convey Chang's and Eng's sentiments as he would continue to do so for the next month and throughout the 1830s before the three of them settled in the same area of North Carolina in 1839.

In a letter written by Charles Harris and addressed to Susan Coffin, he recalled reading her letter from the 22nd of May to Chang and Eng and recorded their meticulous refutation of the claim that they owed anything further to Susan or Abel Coffin.³⁷³ "As to the 'promise' made to Captain Coffin 'that they would stay under Mrs. Coffin until the return of the Captain to the U.S' as to this they say there must be a great mistake somewhere as they must deny this altogether," Harris characterized Chang's and Eng's position. As they recalled their last agreement with Abel Coffin they were "to consider themselves under his control" only until January 1832, to which Abel Coffin

372 Letter, Chang-Eng to Capt'n Davis – (for Mrs. Coffin), July 1832. [NDCA] Siamese Twins Collection P.C. 916.1. Correspondence, Charles Harris to the Coffins, 1832.

373 Letter, Charles Harris signed Chang Eng to Susan Coffin, May 29, 1832. [NDCA] Siamese Twins Collection P.C. 916.1. Correspondence, Charles Harris to the Coffins, 1832.

“immediately stated that of course when they attained the age of 21 they were ‘Their Own Men’ to use the words of Captain [Coffin] on the occasion.”³⁷⁴ Notably, Chang and Eng never acknowledged that they were to stay under Susan Coffin’s control at all, their only agreement being with Abel Coffin himself. And as for that agreement, Chang and Eng managed to use the captain’s own words against him taking up the age-based determination that shifts the brothers from dependents to “their own men,” possessive individualism as measured by coming to age in a particular narrative of progressive masculinization. With this legal fiction of manhood, that Chang and Eng wedged their separation from the Coffin’s and crafted their self-made men narrative. They inverted Susan Coffin’s implication that Chang and Eng were not “keeping to their word” that they would stay under Susan Coffin’s control, “for according to that view of the case (say they) if Captain Coffin should never return to the U.S. they would to the end of their lives remain as they now are.”³⁷⁵ To the extent that they recognized their dependance on Abel Coffin, it was only a temporary matter that would not fix their position in the world to another man’s actions.

In some ways this language also reflects the contractual discourse surrounding pauper apprenticeships in early America, which bound out poor and orphaned children to indentured servitude to families responsible for providing food, housing, and education for the child in exchange for their labor and good behavior. Across 18,000 contracts in the United States, Ruth Herndon and John Murray note that most positioned the child as a servant until adulthood, usually defined as twenty-one years of age for boys and sixteen or eighteen for girls.³⁷⁶ Herndon and Murray’s study of the pauper apprenticeship system in the United States excludes both slaves and

374 Letter, Charles Harris signed Chang Eng to Susan Coffin, May 29, 1832. [Page 1].

375 Letter, Charles Harris signed Chang Eng to Susan Coffin, May 29, 1832. [Page 2.]

376 Ruth Wallis Herndon and John Murray, *Children Bound to Labor: The Pauper Apprentice System in Early America*, (Cornell University Press, 2010): 1.

indentured immigrant labor, it raises comparative context to understand the master/servant, parent/child, and family/state relationships that Chang and Eng were navigating in their separation from the Coffins. Chang and Eng did not fit easily in any simple categorization of 19th century racialized labor in America, not precisely apprentices but also neither precisely colonized nor enslaved.

On the second page of the letter, Chang and Eng turned to refusing Susan Coffin's claim of "doing all she could for their comfort & loving them & liking them," by impugning her aims as commercial extraction. "They feel confident she will discover that the great loving & likeing [sic] was not for their own sakes but for the sake of the said Dollars," and further evidenced by all of the "cruel manners" in which Chang and Eng were forced to appear in crowded rooms while they were sick and such other incidents in New York, London, and Bath. In a critique of the monstrous intimacies of white familial affection, they concluded their letter by refusing to believe the discourse of professed white maternal love, "in fact, they say, the less she says about loving & liking the better."

They extended this postcolonial critique of the white liberal assumption that love absolves the commodified violence of the colonial situation in a follow up letter written on June 15th. Chang and Eng refuted Susan Coffin's claim that Abel and Susan Coffin were the "losers" in the Siamese Twins venture, arguing that the pair spent more for their comfort than receiving in receipts.³⁷⁷ Over the course of five pages, Chang and Eng detailed the extensive profits the Coffins had made from their grueling labor over the course of their arrival through the present moment, noting that they had made \$10/month until the March 1831 contract that raised their wage to \$50/month. Worse

377 Letter, Charles Harris signed Chang Eng to Susan Coffin, June 15, 1832. [NDCA] Siamese Twins Collection P.C. 916.1. Correspondence, Charles Harris to the Coffins, 1832.

yet, Susan Coffin made a display of describing Chang's and Eng's possessions, such as a little gold pocket watch that was commonly depicted in their show materials and that they wore to the standing room, as gifts given to the brothers by her husband when it was actually "bought with money hard earned" by the twins who worked day and night to "fill her & her husband's pocket with money."³⁷⁸

Taking their claim one step further, they suggested that any losses the Coffins felt were due to Susan Coffin's inept management of money, in particular taking aim at the ways in which she spent such a "large outlay of money in England" not to support Chang's and Eng's comfort but to sustain what they described as a bloated "travelling family."³⁷⁹ In closing the June 15 letter, Chang and Eng noted that "from former experience" they "expected" the Coffins' to express "angry feelings" inevitably whenever Chang and Eng expressed their "determination to quit 'the concern.'" While such indecorous manner of engagement was "not my way," they write through Harris, "it appears to be the practice of some people in all cases."³⁸⁰ In separating from the Coffins, not only do they articulate a detailed accounting of the case that they were economically exploited, but they also criticized Susan Coffin for her commercial attitude, incapacity to manage money, and distasteful accusations.

In another example, and as rhetorical performance of the veracity of their claims by way of repeating a litany of complaints, Chang and Eng supported their argument that Susan Coffin's character was of questionable taste in a repetition of the story of the "piece of blue cloth." Apparently a blue cloth was gifted to Chang and Eng in Leeds to make two suits. Upon taking what they needed to make their suits, Chang and Eng offered the remaining material to Mr. and

378 Letter, Charles Harris signed Chang Eng to Susan Coffin, June 15, 1832. [Page 2].

379 Letter, Charles Harris signed Chang Eng to Susan Coffin, June 15, 1832. [Page 5].

380 Letter, Charles Harris signed Chang Eng to Susan Coffin, June 15, 1832. [Page 5].

Mrs. Kipling, whom they had been staying with in the Poultry during their trip to London. At Portsmouth, Chang and Eng informed Susan Coffin they had done so, and she had become “considerably vexed.” She “made Mr. Hale sit down & write a letter to James Everett asking him to call on Mr. Kipling and get back the piece of cloth.” Mrs. Kipling refused to give the cloth to Susan Coffin, which Chang and Eng speculated with confidence that she wanted to “keep it for her own purposes.” The blue cloth may seem like a small matter, but for Chang and Eng they began to assume that one could “judge pretty well a persons [sic] conduct in matters of importance by the manner in which they behave in trifles.”³⁸¹ As a story that clearly stuck with Chang and Eng, the lessons of the blue cloth were tied to the gendered colonial narrative of the possession of things. It also perhaps confirms the inference that Susan Coffin was becoming increasingly present and engaged in the business to keep a watchful eye on the finances of the exhibitions of the Siamese Twins.

Chang and Eng grew to like the Coffin’s less and less over time. In fact, Chang and Eng never liked Susan Coffin. Chang and Eng dictated a list of Susan Coffin’s faults to Harris. The brothers complained to Harris that she spoke out of turn about private matters and spoke poorly of others in the brothers’ company.

There was one thing which always occurred to prevent my [Chang-Eng] liking Mrs. Coffin which was that in every fresh place which we got to she always took pains to let the family of the house know all about Mr. Hale’s & my private affairs with Capt’n. Coffin. Another reason why I could not like Mrs. Coffin is that she made a point of talking against her acquaintances [and] in some cases of talking about those whom she had never even seen, but merely knew by report! Of one thing I had good reason to be sure; the more any person liked me so much the more was that person hated by Mrs. Coffin.

381 Letter, Chang-Eng to Captain Wm. Davis Jun – Newbury Port Massachusetts, July 11, 1832. [NDCA] Siamese Twins Collection P.C. 916.1. Correspondence, Charles Harris to the Coffins, 1832.

However, Chang's and Eng's separation case reached its pitch on American Independence Day.³⁸² The day before, Charles Harris had sent Tom Dwyer home to Newburyport, as Chang and Eng "did not like to keep Tom any longer under the same arrangement as Mrs. Coffin made with him," presuming they could save some expense by packing a smaller wage to another attendant as they had with a "boy" named William that had traveled with the group when Hale was the charge.³⁸³ In response to the Newburyport inquiry from either Susan Coffin or Captain Davis into "who is to attend with C Eng in their movement," Harris admitted that he intended to do so and if it were not him he was sure they "would write to Mr. Hale & ask him to manage their business for them."³⁸⁴ Closing this letter, Chang and Eng signed a request that Mrs. Coffin "pack up all their things" and have them addressed "to the care of Elliot & Palmer 20 William St. New York ... as soon as possible."³⁸⁵ Chang and Eng were severing ties, first with their Newburyport attendant being sent home, and again in their request for their possessions from Newburyport to be sent to them in New York or Boston. The next day Chang and Eng visited with Captain Sherburn and learned that they had been stowed in steerage on the passage to England because Abel Coffin refused to pay full fare causing their "feelings [to be] so strong worked upon" that they called for "Mr. Harris [who] sleeps in their same room" to "write" to her at such "a queer time to sit up [and] write letters"

382 Letter, Chang Eng to Captain Davis, July 4, 1832. [NDCA] Siamese Twins Collection P.C. 916.1. Correspondence, Charles Harris to the Coffins, 1832.

383 Letter, Charles Harris to Captain William Davis, July 3, 1832. [NDCA] Siamese Twins Collection P.C. 916.1. Correspondence, Charles Harris to the Coffins, 1832. In a later letter Chang and Eng suggest Susan Coffin issued a complaint with Mr. Hale hiring "the boy 'William'" for \$300/year over the summer when she by contrast paid "the 'Gentleman' from Newbury Port ... Tho Tho. Dwyer" \$46/month. While beyond my analysis here a closer consideration of William the boy and Tom Dwyer the gentleman could further complicate the class and gender boundaries of labor in attending to Chang and Eng as part of the business of the Siamese Twins exhibitions. For Chang and Eng, they merely use the example as further evidence of Susan Coffin's deceit and moral character (see Letter, Change-Eng to Capt'n Davis – for Mrs. Coffin), July 1832. [NDCA] Siamese Twins Collection P.C. 916.1. Correspondence, Charles Harris to the Coffins, 1832.). On June 23, 1832, a ledger entry "Tom Dwyer's Wages (from 1st June) ... \$6.25" is recorded. ("An Account of monies expended by Chang-Eng, June 1832, p. 8 <https://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/bunkers/id/800/rec/1>)

384 Letter, Charles Harris to Captain William Davis, July 3, 1832. [Page 2].

385 Letter, Charles Harris to Captain William Davis, July 3, 1832. [Page 3].

(addressed 14 past 12 at night).³⁸⁶ At the break of the Fourth of July, Chang and Eng again declared their independence from the Coffins.

Chang's and Eng's Fourth of July letter makes an important intervention into the "bought" and "sold" debates that they had found themselves entangled working under the Coffins in America. In an extended metaphor, Chang and Eng compare themselves with a ship that, after years of reliable service to their owner, becomes worn out over time and (mis)use ceased to bring in an income and "all that now remains is to sell her for whatever 'she will fetch.'" The poor old ship reminded Chang and Eng of their own situation, "but, thank God," not precisely so because "in one particular [they are] more fortunate than the poor old undesirable ship, for although 'I have been bought' (as has been said to many of me) yet 'I cannot be sold.'" ³⁸⁷ Chang and Eng were not objects even as they had been objectified. They were not slaves to be sold. In fact, in good health and notwithstanding the abuses of the Coffins, Chang and Eng optimistically imagined their prospects of going out on their own without being burdened by the expenses incurred for maintaining her household. Their separation narrative a matter of economic motivation as well as one of masculinity, race, and disability.

By mid-July, Chang and Eng were no longer receiving responses to their letters, which seemed to intensify their anger and frustration with Susan Coffin and Captain Davis who was receiving their letters. Chang and Eng were increasingly confident in the case they had made, writing, "I am not afraid nor ashamed to meet [Captain] Coffin face to face." Taking aim at Captain Davis' attempt to defer the argument to Abel Coffin's arrival, Chang and Eng noted that they do

386 Letter, Chang Eng to Captain Davis, July 4, 1832..

387 Comparative rhetoric of enslaved black men navigating gradual emancipation deserves closer scrutiny here alongside colonization schemes and plans for free black public participation were being deployed in various ways throughout the U.S. in this period.

not envy his position of trying to defend the Coffins' actions comparing the task to that of "wash[ing] coal" so as to make it appear white" or "sew[ing] a tear in a new coat so that the mark of the sewing may not be afterwards seen." Tasks that "requires some person more capable than you," they concluded. In fact, a lesson had been learned about colonial speech.

In future I shall be cautious of such men as tell me they are anxious to serve me [and] that they like me as well as their own brother. I shall, from experience (our best schoolmaster) be cautious of such men; as I begin to think that those who talk the least about friendship are the most likely to show their friendship in the time of need.³⁸⁸

They had come to age in the context of the fast talk that resonates in enfreakment rhetoric and they were heeding the lessons of their own performance. Chang and Eng extended this lesson to the assertions that Abel Coffin would follow through on his agreement to pay their mother \$500 and would return them to Siam, observing that, "when a man breaks his word in one particular it is rather difficult to rely on him for the keeping of his word in other matters."³⁸⁹

In a final letter written July 27, 1832, from Madison Village New York, Charles Harris wrote to Captain Davis recommending that he "forward your letter to Mr. Hale at Boston who generally knows from Chang-Eng our movements – as they often communicate with him generally once a week." In a separated part of the letter, Chang-Eng asked Captain Davis again to have "Mrs. Coffin to send all the things in her case to Elliot & Palmer" in New York. It is unclear whether

388 Letter, Chang-Eng to Captain Wm. Davis Jun – Newbury Port Massachusetts, July 11, 1832. [NDCA] Siamese Twins Collection P.C. 916.1. Correspondence, Charles Harris to the Coffins, 1832.

389 Letter, Change-Eng to Captn Davis – (for Mrs. Coffin), July 1832. [NDCA] Siamese Twins Collection P.C. 916.1. Correspondence, Charles Harris to the Coffins, 1832. In the most extended discussion of their interpretation of the original agreement that I have found they write through Harris: "As to "Captn Coffin making his own arrangements on his return home" we are at a loss to suppose what this can mean as related to us but suppose his arrangements be to return me to my mother at the end of 18 months from the day of my leaving Siam which was the 1st of April 1829! And giving to my mother according to his promise 500 dollars more! And taking me back to her himself! As to the first of these arrangements [–] returning me at the end of 18 months [–] I need hardly draw your attention to the state of the case. If I were to go home immediately it would be almost 48 months instead of 18 months from the time I left till the time of my return home, but if I had remained quietly for 48 years in the same situation of servitude in which I have been up to a very late period, the promise of sending me home would not have been once thought of. And at the end of that (as now) that "Captn C. would lose money by me" This assertion shows a degree of impudence which I was unprepared to expect but this is a strange world!" Strange world, indeed.

Chang and Eng were ever returned their belongings. However, in their separation from the Coffins to go out as “their own men” they were not separating from all of those they had come to work with, keeping Harris on as a manager of the business and picking up with Hale to craft a revised fitting narrative.³⁹⁰ Letters between Hale and Harris suggest that Hale’s relationship with Chang and Eng never really concluded and that they often stayed in touch through written letters.

5.6 Conclusion

Aggrandizing enfreakment of the Siamese Twins was a civilizing narrative. It sought to disassociate Chang and Eng from their national home in Siam by associating more closely with their American and British cultural dwellings. The Siamese Twins’ staging, dress, performance, and increasingly their ability to converse in English were key symbols in drawing the aggrandizing associations with a gentleman’s performance of self. As seen in the last chapter, Abel and Susan Coffin’s roles in the narrative were described as civilizing forces on Chang and Eng whom they benevolently looked after as their own children, helping them integrate into civil society. In proximity to the white family, and through their contacts with cultural elite in their traveling exhibitions, Chang’s and Eng’s network of associations were carried out through colonial channels. While Chang and Eng left for London as insured bodies stowed in steerage, they returned to New York sharing the privileges of passengers.

390 Letter, Charles Harris to Dear Sir, July 27, 1832. [NDCA] Siamese Twins Collection P.C. 916.1. Correspondence, Charles Harris to the Coffins, 1832.

Efforts to disassociate Chang and Eng from a sensationalized Orient was a persistent task for the staging of the Siamese Twins, even as it attracted some audience members. While Chang and Eng cultivated their capacities to speak for themselves in English, some white audiences were not prepared to register the civilizing disassociations in the Siamese Twins' performance. Phrenologically informed racialization offered some audiences a prefigured taxonomy of relationships between bodies and characteristics in that they attempted to fix associations through essentialized comparison. Philip Hone's diary entry, for example, took note of Chang's and Eng's speaking English and yet he returned to the familiar narrative of racialized enfreakment of the Siamese Twins, describing them as "freaks of nature" that are surprisingly not disagreeable in their sight, but whose face is read of the unintelligent "East." In other cases, Chang and Eng were not given space to speak and instead were staged as props that were spoken about and for, despite their abilities. Chang's and Eng's conversational English was an essential component of their efforts to make for themselves new associations to integrate into American sociality, but these examples caution against conceiving of speaking English as a key to freedom without constraint.

Chang's and Eng's racialized associations were not only to an orientalist East, but also were entangled with discourse of American indigeneity. In some cases, racialization of Chang's and Eng's bodies was rhetorically produced through comparative association with the conception of the color and texture of American Indian skin and its attendant colonial meanings. The conjunction between the Siamese Twins and American Indian skin, which gives way to 'yellowing' in the 1850s, is a rhetorical act to fix associations of settler difference. In a different rhetorical register, James Hale's colonial nicknaming of Chang and Eng as "Cherokee" and "Qui Hi" positioned the brothers in the transit of empire by bringing them into association with American settler contexts and British Indian colonialism. Hale's association of Chang and Eng

with “Cherokee,” however, ironically dissociated them from indigeneity by bracketing the comparison as a playful masquerade that brought Chang and Eng and Hale together in friendship. Accordingly, in March 1831, the U.S. Supreme Court construction of the “domestic dependent nation” category for the Cherokee nation as a liminal paradox for indigeneity fits uneasily in the case of Chang’s and Eng’s return to the United States in that same cultural context.

Chang’s and Eng’s associations and disassociations to blackness were also a critical rhetorical matter in antebellum American public life. In one example, the white Lynnfield mob’s use of racialized epithet associated Chang and Eng with blackness, which was conjoined to their hunt of the brothers as beasts. If Hale’s playful colonial nicknaming of Chang and Eng associated the twins with American Indians at an ironic distance that simultaneously disassociates the twins from occupying such a position, the Lynnfield mob’s naming Chang and Eng “niggers” collapsed that space of disassociation. While some white men in the U.S. northeast sought to disassociate from the white mob’s classless behavior, it is curious that it nonetheless turned to humor and witticisms that associated Chang and Eng with an orientalist caricature. In the wake of the Nat Turner rebellion in Virginia, by contrast, Chang’s and Eng’s associations with blackness were registered less through racial epithet than through their liminal position in being “bought” and “sold.” In these cases, the conceptualization of orientalism is perhaps even more instructive when read alongside black monstrosity as a framework for thinking about racialization through blackening of some subjects.³⁹¹

391 Eric King Watts, “Postracial fantasies, blackness, and zombies,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 14(4), 2017: 317-333. Watts explains blackening in the context of black monstrosity (specifically zombies) in late 21st century US life, but as a rhetorical practice it is useful equipment to think through this case too. Describing the breakdown of white sociality can result in “reactionary logics and practices of blackening, where anyone whomsoever may be violently seized and made to pay penance; this risk of punishment and death, however, historically and conventionally clings to bodies that more readily signify blackness, deformation, and revulsion; but the risk of contamination—the risk of blackening—can spread widely, rapidly” (323).

It has been tempting to write Chang's and Eng's history as a progressive "success story" that tracks along a smooth self-made man narrative. While this chapter moves in that channel, I purposefully texture that narrative to disrupt the sense that this aggrandizing story was any smooth task. Racialized comparison and conflation both constrained and enabled Chang and Eng to cultivate a sense of themselves as honorable gentlemen. Chang and Eng were neither precisely colonized nor enslaved. Within the context of the aggrandizing frame of the exhibitions of the Siamese Twins, and sometimes in their association to whiteness as dependents of respected gentlemen, Chang and Eng were able to associate themselves with whiteness in ways that were foreclosed for others. Chang and Eng were contracted to receive a wage for their work, when the enslaved were owned by bill of sale. Chang and Eng were educated in English language and manners as part of the aggrandizing enfreakment performance when literacy laws made such education illegal for many. Harris, on behalf of Chang and Eng, could petition and be recognized in their published memorial for tax exemption in the Virginia assembly, even if their appeal was denied. Chang and Eng were fined for their physical assault of a white man, when such a breach of peace would be cause for capital punishment in other racialized contexts. In each case – working, speaking, and fighting – Chang's and Eng's masculine performances in their private lives are cultivated as part of the creation of their public persona as the Siamese Twins. It is through those self-making performances that Chang and Eng do the work of becoming "their own men," a sovereign dissociation from their status as dependents and association with those practices of honorable gentlemen.

This chapter engaged "separation stories" to complicate an impulse to write Chang's and Eng's return to the United States as a smooth progress narrative. Comparing and contrasting James Hale and Chang's and Eng's separations with the Coffins offers one way to mark the rhetorical

maneuvers of whiteness and masculinity. Race did not appear in the language of Hale's separation letter as it did in some of the other stories in the chapter, which is not evidence that race was not at play, but instead suggests the ways in which whiteness works as an unmarked center. Marking Hale's separation story as an association with whiteness invited a comparison of how his performance of white masculinity could, and did, recur in Chang's and Eng's case for separation. In both cases, Hale and Chang and Eng declared their separation as an act of masculine honor and a defense of their public character. Given the ongoing correspondence between Hale and Chang and Eng it is possible that he helped them craft their letters to wedge Chang and Eng away from the Coffins for his own economic reasons.

As a matter of masculinity, both stories targeted gendered criticism of Susan Coffin as the cause for their separations as the exigency for their disassociation with the Coffins. Hale took insult at comments Susan Coffin made to his wife, Almira, about his work with the Siamese Twins and, similarly, Chang and Eng took offense at Susan Coffin's claim that the Coffins were benevolent losers on the Siamese Twins business enterprise. In their justification for their disassociation, Hale and Chang and Eng attacked the character of Susan Coffin as an incompetent manager and scandalously "independent" woman. One lesson of the parallels is the ways in which association with white masculinity was often grounded in the disassociation from women.

However, differences are also instructive. For example, Hale's disassociation was *particularly* focused to exclude Susan Coffin while attempting to maintain his friendship and business relationship with Abel Coffin. Chang and Eng, on another hand, disassociated from both Susan and Abel Coffin to frame a narrative for themselves as independent men. It was an assertion of their capacity to take possession of themselves and demonstrate how they were no longer dependent on the Coffins' management. Chang's and Eng's separation story navigated their

personal and public concern about their liminal position between “bought” and “sold” in ways that Hale’s story did not. Even so, both separation stories are moved through a narrative that figured themselves as self-made men making themselves through defending their honor from public insult and asserting their possessive individualism.

In the next chapter, I analyze the invention of the “Siamese Twins, under their own direction,” a narrative that was used to enfreak their public performances throughout the 1830s. While some have read this shift in the rhetorical framing of Chang’s and Eng’s as evidence of their agency to write their own story, I argue James Hale’s return to the creation of new show materials suggest that a self-made man narrative was co-invented, performed, and received in many ways.³⁹² What becomes clear is that the power to tell one’s own story is important equipment for moving in white colonial patriarchal society, and yet, self-made man narratives are never made by single men.

³⁹² Hunter, *The Duet*, 1964; Wallace and Wallace, *The Two*, 1978; Bogdan, *Freak Show*, 1988.

6.0 Chapter 5: “Under their Own Direction”: Self-Made Man, Co-Production, and Rights to the Story

Chang’s and Eng’s separation from the Coffin’s required an adjustment to both the management of their own everyday lives and the public exhibitions of themselves as the Siamese Twins. In this chapter I chart the changing constructions of masculinity, nation, and disability in two show biographies produced for the exhibitions of Chang and Eng, the Siamese Twin Brothers in the 1830s. The first pamphlet, entitled *An Historical Account of the Siamese Twin Brothers: From Actual Observations*, was first published in 1829 in London and 1831 in the United States. The pamphlet was written by James Hale, who, along with Able Coffin, was Chang’s and Eng’s acting manager at the time.³⁹³ The second pamphlet was published in 1836, several years after the twins had broken away from the Coffins and they began managing and promoting themselves. Entitled *A Few Particulars Concerning Chang-Eng, The United Siamese Brothers, Published Under Their Own Direction*, this show biography was produced, in part, as a corrective to the early pamphlets published concerning Chang and Eng.³⁹⁴ Hale’s new show biography, purportedly published under the direction of Chang and Eng, sought to “correct” the public record and marks an important shift in the Siamese Twins narrative that centers the brothers as self-made men.

This period, between becoming their own men and staging the Siamese Twins under their own direction, is sometimes marked in the narrative of Chang’s and Eng’s lives as their critical

393 [James Hale], *An Historical Account of the Siamese Twin Brothers, from Actual Observations*. New York: Elliott & Palmer, 1831. Referenced as *Historical Account* hereafter, with attention to edition changes in context of the archival discussion about the production of the pamphlet. See chapter 3 for a close reading of this pamphlet.

394 James W. Hale, *A Few Particulars Concerning Chang-Eng, the United Siamese Brothers, Published under Their Own Direction*. New York: J. M. Elliott, 1836. Hereafter *A Few Particulars*.

turn toward freedom and autonomy. In their popular biography, for example, Irving Wallace and Amy Wallace mark the moment as the conjuncture of the brothers' freedom from constraint, their ability to exercise their own agency in choosing to exhibit themselves.³⁹⁵ Read uncritically, exhibition materials can confirm a redemptive narrative of Chang and Eng as self-made men obfuscating the complex rhetorical, legal, political, and cultural conditions that made the inventions of such narratives of autonomous selfhood possible.³⁹⁶ Chang and Eng became "of age" in an period where "ideas about the propertied relationship to oneself and the interlocked concepts of citizenship, fair treatment, contractual agreement, and economic self-determination inform modernity's constitution of rational, sovereign personhood" were changing.³⁹⁷ This chapter analyzes the rhetorical contexts in order to understand the economic, ideological, and material significance of the changing Siamese Twins exhibition narratives.

The changing exhibition narrative sought to foreground the Siamese Twins as self-made men and autonomous individuals, but the contexts of its production was the work of many more than just the individual men exhibiting themselves. "Under their own direction" did not mean that Chang and Eng were alone in constructing and performing the Siamese Twins exhibitions. Charles Harris continued to act as a traveling manager for their exhibitions throughout the 1830s and kept an extensive account book that detail the expenses, travel routes, consumption patterns of the brothers, and reception by various American audiences. James Hale also became more involved,

395 Irving Wallace and Amy Wallace, *The Two: A Biography*, (Bantam Books: New York, 1978): 139-176.

396 For an important comparative case on navigating the troubles of authorship and autobiography in the freak show narratives produced for conjoined twins' exhibitions consider the methodological discussion around race, disability, and gender in the production and circulation of Millie-Christine McKoy's show biographies. (See Martell, Joanne. *Millie-Christine: Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*. Winston-Salem, NC, Blair, 2000; Frost, Linda. *Conjoined Twins in Black and White: The Lives of Millie-Christine McKoy and Daisy and Violet Hilton*. Madison, WI, University of Wisconsin Press, 2009; Brooks, Daphne A. "Fraudulent Bodies/Fraught Methodologies." *Legacy*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2007, pp. 306-14; Samuels, Ellen. "Examining Millie and Christine McKoy: Where Enslavement and Enfreakment Meet." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2011, pp. 53-81).

397 Wu, *Chang and Eng Reconnected*, 19.

advising the brothers on narrative frames for their promotion and eventually publishing the new show biography. In this sense, the “Siamese Twins, under their own direction” was a co-production of several authors with varying interests and power in the rights to produce and profit from the exhibition of the Siamese Twins. By co-production I mean to highlight how Hale could not sell his narrative without Chang’s and Eng’s exhibitions and Chang and Eng could not fully profit from their exhibition without Hale’s written narrative. That dependent relationship, which is asymmetrical, is what I am trying to get at when I am writing about co-production.

Analyzing the ongoing correspondence between James Hale and Chang and Eng alongside the new narrative makes apparent the contested construction the self-made man narrative. Chang and Eng were enabled to take on additional roles that were previously constrained by the assumption of their ability, race, and dependence on the Coffins. Chang’s and Eng’s exhibitions under their own direction built upon the aggrandizing frames that they had been performing since their first tour of Europe. For example, Chang and Eng continued to dress as respectable gentlemen and their skills in playing chess continued to be both a representational and performative element of their exhibitions. However, they also began asserting themselves as under their own control they drew upon a rhetoric of self-possessive masculinity and manhood that amplified new interest as audiences came in wonder of how this new direction would unfold.

In the next section, I analyze a series of correspondence between James Hale, Charles Harris, and Chang and Eng that describe the motivations and plans to re-narrate the exhibitions of the “Siamese Twins.” The letter exchanges reveal the context of the production of the new narrative as deeply entangled in a copyright dispute between James Hale and Abel Coffin on who owned the Siamese Twins promotional materials, specifically *An Historical Account* and the plates used to print images. James Hale’s imagined re-writing of a new narrative as an act of honorable

revenge, casting Coffin as slave owning villain rather than benevolent father, is made explicit by Hale in his letters, raising the stakes of the proposed narrative. The letters open questions around who owns what Siamese Twins stories and clarify the power of telling their narrative otherwise, while offering context for discussions about the position of Chang and Eng in crafting their own narrative and constructing their own image as a self-making practice. Given the frequent citation of Chang's and Eng's show materials as exemplars of the ideological framing of the freak show, closer attention to the details of how the materials were produced is critical to making more informed claims about attributions of authorship, agency, and autonomy.

In the second section of this chapter, I analyze the text of *A Few Particulars*, the show biography written and circulated for their exhibitions in 1836. *A Few Particulars* makes several important shifts in the narrative of the Siamese Twins. While the structure of the book largely retains the orientalist and medical enfreakment of Chang and Eng, including the re-print of medical men's testimony to offer authority to close the pamphlet, the particulars move the narrative in additional directions that merit closer attention. First, the narrative takes up the privileged speaking position from as an authentic voice emerging from the brothers' lived experiences in Siam. Second, the narrative re-writes themselves as self-made men prior to ever having met Robert Hunter or Abel Coffin. Not only do they distance themselves from the rhetoric around having been "bought" and "sold," they construct a narrative of their own industriousness in commerce that did not rely upon their conjoined bodies being examined and purchased for profit. Third, the narrative re-turns the orientalist criticisms of Siam as superstitious and backwards by paralleling such occasions as evident in their own observations about America, a critique of American exceptionalism rooted in the common presence of uncivilized people no matter where one is in the world. From their perspective, Chang and Eng represent themselves as cosmopolitan gentlemen who are peers to

other such men, in part because they recognize themselves as more intellectually civilized than some of the Americans whom they had met in their travels.

My readings of the 1830s Chang and Eng biographies within the context of its co-production contribute to conversations about the critical consideration of nation, race, masculinity and disability by situating the progressive narrative of masculine self-possession as an important line for making and remaking notions of who and what represents America, whiteness, and ability within asymmetrical contexts of the right to produce and profit from the sale of the Siamese Twins narrative. Scholars working in Disability Studies and Asian American Studies have produced excellent treatments of the ways in which the antebellum and postbellum exhibitions and representations of Chang and Eng inflected cultural discourse throughout the nineteenth century. Allison Pingree notes the public notoriety of the twins' bodies was often used for cultural communication as their bodies became sites for symbolic contestation of national, racial, class, and ability. She argues antebellum representations of Chang and Eng provided a model for the "complicated transactions between American culture and its 'monsters.'"³⁹⁸ Reading the American visual iconography on the brothers show biography alongside early sectarian American political rhetoric, Pingree suggests that "not only is patriotism employed to sell the twins, the twins themselves are used to sell democratic nationalism."³⁹⁹ Cynthia Wu argues postbellum representations of Chang and Eng Bunker as classed, racialized, and able bodied subjects "are over-determined by a late-nineteenth-century social fabric unraveled and rewoven by

398 Allison Pingree, "America's 'United Siamese Brothers': Chang and Eng and Nineteenth-Century ideologies of Democracy and Domesticity," In *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996): 94-95.

399 Pingree, "America's 'United Siamese Brothers'", 1996: 94.

emancipation, reconstruction, and the industrial revolution in the emerging U.S. empire.”⁴⁰⁰ Alongside Pingree and Wu, the show biographies produced for the early exhibitions of Chang and Eng – and their changes over time – demonstrate the complicated, and often contradictory, modes of exclusion and inclusion that constrained and enabled Asian American masculinities throughout the period. Reading *A Few Particulars* within the context of co-production we can better understand the ways in which the corrections centered Chang and Eng as laboring men and intelligent men and how those corrections were important to figuring them as acceptable American gentlemen. Through strategic claims to performing masculinity Chang and Eng occupy roles in American society that would usually exclude racial, ethnic and disabled others. Even so, that narrative is not their own production solely, even as they attempt to live it in their everyday lives they are constrained by aspects of racial and ableist cultural constraints.

6.1 Copyright Contexts

A copyright dispute over the ownership the *An Historical Account* emerged between James Hale and Abel Coffin in 1832. While Hale had not been traveling and managing the day-to-day production of the exhibitions since 1831, he was still being paid copyright fees from the print of each new edition of the pamphlet.⁴⁰¹ In November 1832, Abel Coffin requested Hale give up his copyright to the narrative.⁴⁰² Hale initially set the request aside but was forced to respond when

400 Cynthia Wu, “The Siamese Twins in Late-Nineteenth-Century Narratives of Conflict and Reconciliation,” *American Literature* 80, no. 1 (March 2008): 48.

401 Letter, Charles Harris to Susan Coffin, January 16, 1832. [NDCA] Siamese Twins Collection P.C. 916.1. Correspondence, Charles Harris to the Coffins, 1832.

402 Letter, James Hale to Charles Harris and Chang-Eng, November 14, 1832. [NCSA] Thurmond Chatham Papers Historical and Family Papers, 1776-1955. Letters to and Notes of Siamese Twins and Dr. Charles Harris 1831-1844.

Coffin hired a lawyer to file a lawsuit. Anticipating the lawsuit, Hale secured copyright for a new narrative and agreed to give up his right to *An Historical Account*.⁴⁰³ A year later, the matter remained unresolved with Hale's offer accepted by Coffins' lawyer, but any further action put on hold until Abel Coffin returned to address the matter personally himself.⁴⁰⁴

James Hale's letters describe his entanglement with Abel Coffin around copyright of the narrative, *An Historical Account of the Siamese Twin Brothers, From Actual Observations* that place Chang and Eng outside the realm of intellectual property citizenship as their life stories were the rights of either Abel Coffin or James Hale. "More than simply a legal construct," Anjali Vats writes, copyright law is "a rhetorical and cultural formation through which national identity and citizenship were and are constituted."⁴⁰⁵ The letters center on the question of who profits from the production and sale of Chang's and Eng's life story as the Siamese Twins. Notably, the question positions the Siamese Twins as an object positioned between possessive men, again.⁴⁰⁶ Having lost a right to the bodies of Chang and Eng who had declared themselves "their own men," the Coffins – and Hale – sought to secure their rights in the ownership of the representations of the Siamese Twins. If Chang and Eng could be recognized as having come into possession of themselves, becoming men who are not owned, the narrative and images associated with their embodied performances were not recognized as their own possession. What is concerning as a

403 Letter, James Hale to Charles Harris with Siamese Twins, May 17, 1833. [NCSA] Thurmond Chatham Papers Historical and Family Papers, 1776-1955. Letters to and Notes of Siamese Twins and Dr. Charles Harris 1831-1844.

404 Letter, James Hale to Charles Harris with Siamese Twins, November 6, 1833. [NCSA] Thurmond Chatham Papers Historical and Family Papers, 1776-1955. Letters to and Notes of Siamese Twins and Dr. Charles Harris 1831-1844.

405 Anjali Vats, *The Color of Creatorship: Intellectual Property, Race, and the Making of Americans*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2020): 33. Vats defines intellectual property – copyright, patent, and trademark – law in rhetorical terms: "Intellectual property law is a set of rhetorics that governs knowledge production. These rhetorics interface with larger cultural narratives about national identity, citizenship, personhood, and economic production" (5). As a copyright dispute that does not formally arise in a court, as much as is imagined as constrained by law, the narratives and images of the Siamese Twins emerge in the context of intellectual property law imagined a scene of rhetorical constraint, but also clearly engaged in the cultivation of personhood at the intersection of race, nation, gender, and disability.

406 Sedgwick, *Between Men*, (Columbia University Press, 2015).

matter of rhetorical and legal exclusion is not only the contested copyright between Hale and Coffin, but that Chang and Eng could not be recognized as the authors of their own story and image.

6.1.1 Economic, Ideological, and Material Uses of *An Account*

Before Chang and Eng articulated their separation from the Coffins, the traveling manager Charles Harris urged the Coffins to approve the printing of a fresh supply of show biographies.⁴⁰⁷ Harris, in explaining his request, highlights the economic, ideological, and material uses of the pamphlets in their exhibitions. According to Harris' projections, "the sale of 1000 books will add \$50 to our receipts," even after paying a copyright fee to "J.W. Hale" for "\$20 [per] thousand." Harris reminds the Coffins "\$50 is not to be despised," perhaps alluding to the agreement that set his own wage, and Chang's and Eng's monthly wage, at \$50 a month.⁴⁰⁸ The pamphlets were an important part of the profitability of the Siamese Twins exhibitions, as Robert Bogdan suggests of the genre of freak show literature more broadly.⁴⁰⁹ However, Harris' letter offers insights into the complexity of the economics of the production of their exhibitions. In his effort to rhetorically navigate his appeal for more pamphlets, Harris sketches a complicated set of economic relationships that revolved around who owned the rights to profit off which parts of the Siamese Twins exhibitions, and how such profitability would be distributed among such concerned individuals.

407 Letter, Charles Harris to Susan Coffin, January 16, 1832.

408 Agreement between Charles Harris and Susan Coffin regarding the care of the twins, Chang and Eng Bunker. *Coffin family papers* (MS010). Historic New England Library and Archives.

409 Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988).

For Harris, Chang and Eng, the “little books” were more than a mere profit-making product. The small pamphlets had ideological and material uses as well. Harris describes the exchange of the pamphlets as important prop in the material culture and performance of 19th century ability, race, and gender.⁴¹⁰ According to Harris, the show biographies performed in a powerful way “of breaking the monotony” of those “unlucky” hours of being visited in the morning and evening by “a room full of dull stupid persons.”⁴¹¹ Harris suggests that he knows Susan Coffin would approve the printing of new pamphlets “if you know how much the selling of these little books lightens the amount of foolish questions asked in the exhibition room,” suggesting a shared sense of superiority and an entitlement to suffer no fools.⁴¹² Complementing Rachel Adams analysis of the audience of the American freak show as an unruly performative space in which boundaries between performer and audience were actively navigated, Harris’ letter offers another perspective on how the performers thought about managing the performance space with audiences of the Siamese Twins.⁴¹³ The material object and coordinates of exchange helped position Harris and Chang and Eng above those that were paying to gaze and converse.

Harris’ letter begins from the premise that Chang and Eng were intelligent men and that it was their audiences who were foolish. Chang and Eng that would later be reflected in *A Few Particulars*. For all the labor to enfreak Chang and Eng as “intelligent in spite of” cultural assumptions about disability and race, it was the audience themselves that were read to be failing to live up to normative standards of intelligence. Harris’ letter reveals a sense of superiority over

410 See Robin Bernstein, “Dances with things: Material culture and the performance of race,” *Social Text* 27(4), 2009: 67-94.

411 Letter, Charles Harris to Susan Coffin, January 16, 1832. [p. 3-4]

412 Letter, Charles Harris to Susan Coffin, January 16, 1832. [p. 4]

413 Rachel Adams, *Sideshow U.S.A.: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination*, (The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

the audience, he suggests the power of the pamphlet narrative to shape the public opinion and interests. If curiosity was the appeal to get audiences into the exhibition room, it was often in the space of conversation that the boundaries of self and public making were done and redone.

6.1.2 Copyright Entanglements, White Masculine Revenge, and Owning the Narrative

In November 1832, shortly after Chang and Eng wrote their letter of separation from the Coffins, Hale wrote to Charles Harris and Chang and Eng describing his plans to leave his home in Boston and join the group in Pittsburgh.⁴¹⁴ However, most of his letter was dedicated to explaining his most recent exchange with Abel Coffin. According to Hale, Coffin had requested “an interview” with him, but did not make much of an effort to set an appointment with him as both Abel and Susan had passed by Hale on the streets in Boston only a few days before without so much as a word. Instead, Coffin wrote a letter to Hale, of which he transcribes a “precious tit bit for luncheon” for Harris and Chang and Eng.

Mr. J W Hale Boston Nov 13. 1832

Sir

My being obliged to leave town previous to the appoint [sic] to meet you I have taken this method of conversation. I sail in six days for India before I leave I wish you to relinquish your right of copyright of a book relating to the Siamese Youths in my favor and return me the \$40 you have rec'd for two thousand of the books for copyright.

I also request everything you have in your hands belonging to the Siamese Youths previous to their becoming of Age as you are knowing to their being under my protection previous to that time.

I wish to ask you what become of your note of hand for \$450 money the Siamese Youths say they lent you. They say your wife had the note. The note of money please send me by complying with this you will oblige me you can see me at the Marlborough Hotel. Have the goodness to call in person or write me an answer immediately.

414 Hale never would end up joining the traveling group again. Letter from James Hale to Charles Harris and Chang-Eng, November 14, 1832. [NCSA] Thurmond Chatham Papers Historical and Family Papers, 1776-1955. Letters to and Notes of Siamese Twins and Dr. Charles Harris 1831-1844.

Yours
Abel Coffin

Coffin's letter, which Hale suggests he has transcribed "verbatim," but is offered as a bit of lunchtime gossip, is written with a curt authority that reflects a sense of aggrieved entitlement in their separation. Coffin asserts his sense of entitlement to all the "belongings to the Siamese Youths," including the copyright of their history, their material possessions, and even their personal loan. Coffin's logic asserts a right of possession of things by way of the rhetoric of protection as possession, anything that was Chang's and Eng's was his while they were "under my protection." Despite Coffin's appeal to the "goodness" of an immediate response, Hale expressed that had no intention of doing so, planning to "fold it up and lay it away ... without paying any attention to his request."⁴¹⁵ Hale did not recognize in Coffin – any longer, at least – the possessive rights in the lives, bodies, and material things of the brothers.

Hale did evidently write to Abel Coffin, but by the time that his letter had arrived Coffin had prepared to leave for India leaving the matter to his lawyer.⁴¹⁶ Hale anticipated that Coffin would become litigious after not hearing back, but he was prepared to navigate the legal dispute through the production of a new revenge narrative of the Siamese Twins.

I suppose he will wait a day or two and then see if he can't get me entangled in a lawsuit. If he does, by the gods, I'll [write] such a "history of the Siamese Youths" and their owner "Captain Abel Coffin, as shall make him curse the day he ever heard of Siam. I have kept myself very cool about him heretofore, and have refrained from saying many things which I might have done; but his dam'd abusive lies about me have roused the old "Indian" within, and I think I shall yet let him know that as large as he is I can bring him down pretty low between the leaves of a 50 page pamphlet. I don't like making the public acquainted with private affairs but he has began [sic] first, we'll see who "first cries, hold, enough."⁴¹⁷

415 Letter, James Hale to Charles Harris and Chang-Eng, November 14, 1832.

416 Letter, James Hale to Charles Harris, December 1832. [NCSA] Thurmond Chatham Papers Historical and Family Papers, 1776-1955. Letters to and Notes of Siamese Twins and Dr. Charles Harris 1831-1844.

417 Letter, James Hale to Charles Harris and Chang-Eng, November 14, 1832.

Hale figures himself as a victim of imagined future legal entanglement, a tactical ploy of means that would be employed by Abel Coffin. Hale writes about copyright law with the same creative disregard as he offered about the Virginia tax laws. In both cases, Hale frames the law as a rhetorical problem to be navigated around and rarely worth the economic trouble of working through. If Abel Coffin takes the matter to the courts, as Hale anticipates, then his aim is not to claim to the original, but instead write a new narrative beyond Coffin's possessive rights.

Hale frames himself as a victim without any other choice but to make public the private affairs of Abel Coffin. Hale's self-narration of his movement from "cool" white masculinity into another state through an appropriation of indigeneity, having "roused the old 'Indian' within, figures his anger as noble but driven by an inner rage that overcomes his usual rational demeanor. He can appropriate masculine, colonialist stereotypes of indigenous anger in order to rationalize and racialize his momentary break from white civil decorum – making public the private affairs of another man. As reassurance of his enlightened masculinity, Hale closes by quoting Macbeth's final line; a moment of movement in the drama of everyday life in which enough is enough and the appeal to violent martyrdom becomes the sign of masculine virtue.⁴¹⁸ Through this curious conjunction of indigeneity and Shakespeare, Hale conjures his exigency to write the new narrative as one of noble masculine self-expression. He makes no mention of the interests of Chang and Eng in this fantasy of writing a new iteration of their life stories.

Hale's proposition to turn toward crafting a new narrative circumvents the legal entanglements of copyright and offers an opportunity to write a new narrative that has social and cultural dividends beyond the buying and selling of the pamphlets themselves. It is the narrative, which stories are told, and how, that is at stake in the production of a new show biography for the

418 William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (New York: New American Library, 1963), (5.8.32–34).

Siamese Twins exhibitions. Hale's implicit suggestion, that in the contexts of Abel Coffin's New England social milieu the association with having "owned" the twins would be morally and socially damaging, is suggestive of the cultural contexts into which he was writing. Hale sees in the production of the narrative an ability to invert the legal and material positions of himself and Abel Coffin, to take the large man and make him low, through his practices of human ownership that cut against Abel Coffin's professed rhetoric of protection. In fact, in a bit of strategic transvaluation, Hale's intention was to turn Coffin's claims to possessive rights in the original Siamese Twins from a legal good to a social ill. Not only is the crafting a new narrative a tactic of navigating legal entanglements around copyright, but Hale also figures his tactical maneuver as one of honorable masculine necessity and centers the production of narrative as a key in contesting asymmetric power relationships. For Hale, it is the power to use the law and legal threat to secure ownership and rights that figures centrally in his asymmetrical power relationship with Abel Coffin. However, Hale's prior access to the legal rights and social space to navigate around some legal constraints were privileges of his white American status and a power not afforded to the brothers. Chang and Eng do not turn to the law for redress because they do not have the confidence in a responsive legal system that would recognize their right to narrate their own stories.

6.1.3 "Not Yet Written": Performing the Siamese Twins, by themselves

Before Hale could write and publish a new narrative, Harris and Chang and Eng were still tasked with promoting and performing the Siamese Twins exhibitions "under their own direction." While Harris and Chang and Eng continued to sell ten editions of *An Account* from 1832-1836 at their exhibitions, they disrupted the narrative it told through printed inserts that added countervailing details to the narrative and through their performative juxtaposition of their staging

themselves without management that conveyed their sense of possessive individualism. Hale helped to craft the Siamese Twins “under their own direction” narrative throughout this interstitial period – between the separation from the Coffins and the 1836 publication of *A Few Particulars* – suggesting Harris, Chang and Eng would benefit through rhetorically reorienting the public narrative by the strategic insertion of a counter narrative. In a January 1833 letter Hale responded to the positive news that the exhibition had been profitable in Columbus, Ohio. He suggested to Harris, “I don’t doubt you will find it materially to your advantage, always to insert something in your bills and advertisements, to the effect that you are now fighting on your own hook and have nothing more to do with Coffin.”⁴¹⁹ Importantly, Hale’s suggestion is that the profitability of the exhibitions is shaped by the narrative frame being offered. The production of new show materials, first by insert and then in production of new pamphlets and images, was important to keep intensifying curiosity for audiences old and new. The narrative of Chang’s and Eng’s progression into a recognizable masculinity is connected to their break from Coffins and going out on their own in their public performances, as recognizable autonomous individuals, is sutured to the commercial success of their exhibitions.

A series of letters record the construction of the new narrative and contextualization or the framing with a clear new hero and new villain. In May 1833, James Hale confirms his expectation of Coffin’s litigious turn and his intention to move forward with his copyright maneuver. Hale writes that, “Coffin’s lawyer” threatened to “institute a suit against me,” and “moreover shall subject my accounts to a legal investigation and oblige me to produce vouchers for all my

419 Letter, James Hale to Charles Harris with Siamese Twins, January 20, 1833. [Gwyn Family Papers. North Carolina Collection. Wilson Library]. Underlining in original.

expenses,” unless he settles “by assigning my copyright to him (i.e., the NYork copyright).”⁴²⁰ While claiming that he would have “no fears” in having his account books examined, he concluded that it would cause too “great loss of time and money” and choose to “assign [his] original copyright to Coffin” given an acquittal on the rest of his account. In a gesture of economic calculation, Hale conveys his assessment that it would be “better to swallow a little ... than to have to pay too dearly for insisting upon my right.” For Hale, it is not a matter only of rights, but a strategic positioning of oneself in relationship to that economic-legal regime. Hale’s power within this apparatus is shaped by the costs of insisting upon his right and the privilege to choose to turn to the law for redress or not. From Hale’s perspective the Coffin’s suit is centrally to cause “vexation and expence [sic], rather than from a belief of the incorrectness of my accounts.” Again, Hale provides another angle to understand copyright law as a rhetorical project that is not only tied to the juridical deliberation of disputes, but already a prefiguring constraint on the public production and circulation of new narratives. Hale’s new pamphlet is a revision written centrally in the context of a copyright dispute over the first pamphlet with the Coffins.

Presumably, Hale’s decision to give up the original copyright was made easier by his intention to “go on and print some more books of a new kind,” noting wryly, “and much good may the old copyright do him.” In fact, Hale already had the copyright for a new pamphlet in hand.

I have obtained the copy right of a new pamphlet which bears this title “An Account of the Siamese United Brothers, by themselves: United We Stand.” Published for the exclusive benefit of the Twins and sold by them only. Price 25 cents.” I’ll have engaged a small wood cut to be made like the one [Lorenzo Bowers] gave you, to be inserted on the title page under the words, “United We Stand.” The cost of the cut will be \$3. I can’t say how soon any will be printed, for I have not finished writing it yet, but you will not want it for some time, as Elliott writes me he has 4000 copies of the old ones on hand. The new book will

420 Letter, James Hale to Charles Harris and Chang and Eng, May 17, 1833. [Page 2]. [NCSA] Thurmond Chatham Papers Historical and Family Papers, 1776-1955. Letters to and Notes of Siamese Twins and Dr. Charles Harris 1831-1844.

be entirely different from the other, and many things will be left out of mine. Your request that the public should know you “are no longer slaves” will of course be attended to. I will venture to say there will be nothing in it which shall contrary to your inclinations.

While the title would later be changed to *A Few Particulars*, the title copyright and his emphasis that the new book would represent Chang’s and Eng’s inclinations align with the narrative ethos in the pamphlet that would later be published. Notably, Hale explicitly frames the narrative as in the interest of Chang and Eng, acknowledging that he would write the new narrative to meet the “request” from Chang and Eng that the “public should know you ‘are no longer slaves.’” If Hale thought that he would use the new pamphlet to mark Abel Coffin with the sin of slavery, Chang and Eng sought to emphasize this point only through an explicit disassociation from such status as property.

The titular move, “by themselves,” works doubly. First, the expression indicates that the brothers were working for themselves, a point emphasized by highlighting that the production, sale, and profits were for the twins only. Second, it indicates that the account was written by Chang and Eng themselves and, enthymematically, presented as a truer account insofar as it was purportedly not shaped by the interests or concerns of a third party. The narrative is written *as if* Hale was reporting Chang’s and Eng’s perspective on American and European society. While Hale’s assertion that Chang’s and Eng’s input would be at the center of writing the new pamphlet is made explicit here, it remains the case that James Hale wrote and secured copyright for the second biography and there is no written record that indicates Chang’s and Eng’s feelings about the narrative itself. While Hale’s title suggests the narrative is told “by themselves” it is more clearly a co-production of more than the brothers themselves. While Hale deplores the Coffin’s power over the twins, his power to publish and profit from the brothers’ life histories in their name makes clear the asymmetrical power relationships between Hale and Chang and Eng as well. By

co-production I'm highlighting a way that texts, including autobiography narratives that try to center the subject as self-made, are in fact the products of the relationship between that writer and others. In this moment expressing an intent to write a new narrative that has not yet been written, Hale's process and its changes are open reminders that narratives could be written otherwise.

What is important about the copyright storyline that appears in James Hale's letters is how it seems to push Hale to write a new narrative that corrects his previous account *and* structures the exclusion of Chang and Eng from the legal right to own the production of their own life story. From my perspective, the context of who owns the right to produce and profit from Chang's and Eng's life stories is important information when trying to offer a critical reading of the text that is ultimately produced (*A Few Particulars*). Given this context, I am not persuaded that the text should be read as evidence of Chang's and Eng's agency to narrate their own story, as Irving and Amy Wallace have indicated in their popular biography of Chang and Eng. While the "under their own direction" purposefully frames Chang and Eng as autonomous agents in constructing their public selves after their break with the Coffins, the co-production of the narrative that highlights the ways the self-made man narrative conceals that many men made the narrative. From this production context, which I try to unpack in this section, we can have a better-informed reading of the second show biography, which I analyze in section two of the chapter.

Understanding the copyright contexts of the new narrative is also helpful context for understanding the changes Chang and Eng made to the exhibition frame after their break with the Coffins (1832) and before the publication of *A Few Particulars* (1836). According to Hale's letters the narrative was produced – in part – according to Chang's and Eng's interests and perspective. Reading the narrative text there does seem to be a concerted effort to frame the brothers as laboring men prior to their dependence on the Coffins and explicitly refuses the characterization that the

brothers had ever been enslaved. While Allison Pingree and Cynthia Wu have written critically about Chang's and Eng's show biographies from this period as contextually constrained and enabled by American ideology, the letters of James Hale suggest that there is some fidelity to represent Chang's and Eng's perspective. While I am not sure that it would be reasonable to say that the narrative reflects Chang's and Eng's "true" analysis of their lives in the worlds they've traversed, Hale does make use of that sense by appealing to their perspective having lived as conjoined twins, lived in Siam, and having traveled across America and Europe. Reading *A Few Particulars* within the context of its co-production suggests that it should be read not as evidence of Chang's and Eng's autonomous agency to craft the public image of themselves nor as evidence that the Siamese Twins exhibition or their lives were only a product of this narrative written without their input. The letters from Hale offer context to read the new narrative as ambiguously somewhere between those two claims.

6.2 Textual Particulars: Corrective Narrating and Masculine Self-Making

By 1836, Hale had prepared the new show biography for publication and sale at the Siamese Twins exhibitions. The introduction to *A Few Particulars* isolates two purposes to produce a new show biography for their exhibition. First, the new pamphlet was constructed to "correct any erroneous statements which may have occurred in previous statements." The pamphlet sets out to correct the public record. Second, the aim was "to convey to the public some idea of the immense expanse of the country" they had toured over the years. Chang's and Eng's corrections were coupled with their observations on America. While *A Few Particulars* draws upon many of the representational tropes established by Hale in their earlier exhibitions, attention

to the corrections of previous pamphlets, also speaks back to American exceptionalism broadly as Chang and Eng are presented as “coming to age” in constructing their own narrative. Close reading the ‘corrections’ in *A Few Particulars* not only complicates the orientalist dynamics of Chang’s and Eng’s exhibition set forth in Hale’s first account, but it also builds upon the masculinization effort undertaken by Chang and Eng by highlighting their entrepreneurial spirit and asserting a demand for recognition of their voices.

A Few Particulars begins by noting the need for printing a public correction of previous accounts given their assertion of themselves as possessive individuals. Hale writes that the need for a few corrections arise because “The pamphlets concerning Chang-Eng, which have been published previous to this time, were written before the period at which they became of age, and also before they understood the English language.”⁴²¹ It should be noted that while Chang and Eng had learned to speak in English quite well by 1836, as most of their exhibition now relied on their conversational skill, there is very little written by Chang and Eng in English in this period, which re-centers the importance of co-production and ability to speak for themselves. Age and language became the crux of the self-made man’s narrating himself into the world. E. Anthony Rotundo argues that coming of age discourses figured importantly in early 19th century constructions of American masculinity, where masculinity was increasingly defined not only against women’s femininity, but also against childish boyhood.⁴²² Michael Kimmel also draws the connection between distinguishing manhood from boyhood entwined with antiblack slave rhetoric and white male American revolutionary feeling.

Being a man meant also not being a boy. A man was independent, self-controlled, responsible; a boy was dependent, irresponsible, and lacked control. And language reflected these ideas. The term *manhood* was synonymous with “adulthood.” Just as black

421 *A Few Particulars*, 1.

422 Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 1993..

slaves were “boys,” the white colonists felt enslaved by the English father, infantilized, and thus emasculated.⁴²³

The linguistic trouble of the Jacksonian conception of manhood as a movement from being a boy was all wrapped up in Chang’s and Eng’s efforts to rhetorically navigate the dynamics of race and ability that constrained their self-made man narratives. Coming of age, from their earliest exhibitions as ‘The Siamese Boys’ and now into ‘Their Own Men,’ is aligned with coming to voice and the capacity to write their own story. Linked with their ability to enter their own contracts on their own terms and coupled with the capacities to tell their own story in English, coming of age is a key moment in the narrative possibility to become self-made men.

While the broad strokes and content of the two show biographies are similar, closer attention to the particular shifts in the narrative show minor movements from Hale’s first orientalist constructions of Siam while repositioning Chang and Eng to assume masculine identification through narrating their own success story as economic entrepreneurs. Even so, space for Chang and Eng to re-narrate their masculinities are always already circumscribed by the medicalized and commodified situation of their exhibitions and delimit their ability to assert their own masculine self-perception. It is similarly circumscribed by the legal system, which to judge from the struggle between Hale and Coffin, it appears Chang and Eng have no direct say. As both pamphlets are written by Hale, the shifts in the narrative foregrounds the complexity in reading the biographies as representative of Chang’s and Eng’s perspective and instead invite close consideration of the co-production of their new narrative.

423 Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, (Oxford University Press, 2006): 14.

6.2.1 Privileged Perspectives: Chinese Men staged as Siamese Brothers for American Audiences

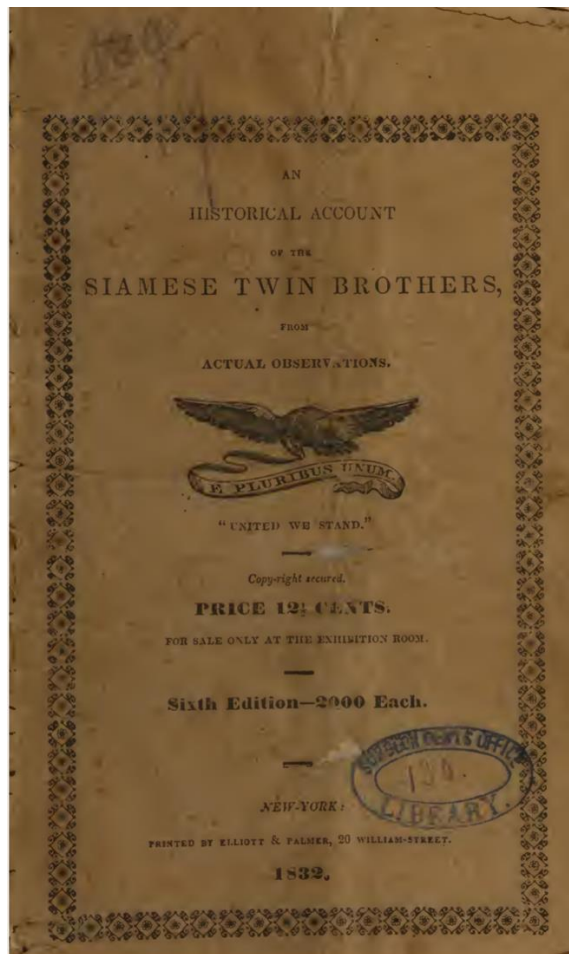


Figure 8 Left Image: Titlepage, [James Hale], *An Historical Account of the Siamese Twin Brothers, From Actual Observations*, 6th Edition, (Printed New York: Elliot & Palmer, 20 William-Street, 1832)

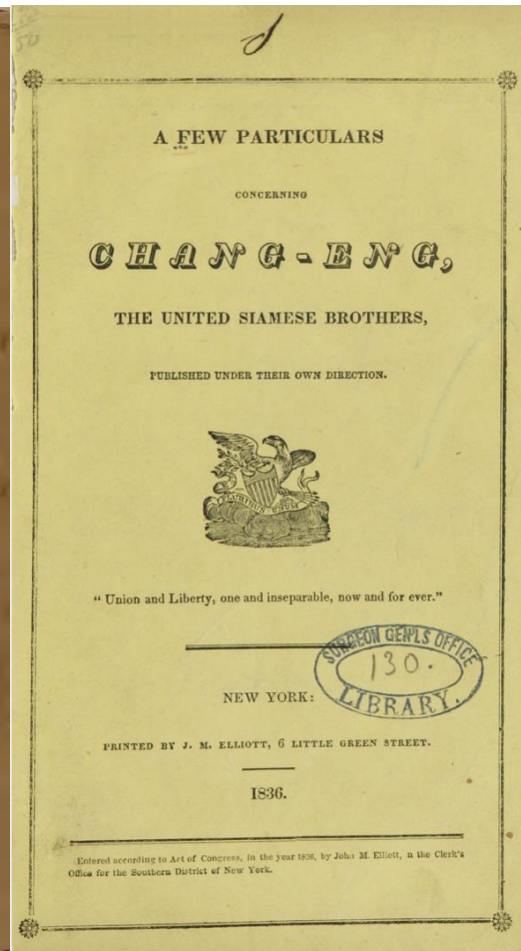


Figure 9 Right Image: Titlepage, James Hale, *A Few Particulars concerning Chang-Eng, The United Siamese Brothers, Published Under their own direction*, (Printed New York: J.M. Elliot, 6 Little Green Street, 1836).

If *An Historical Account* foregrounds totalizing and authoritative frame to narrate the “Siamese Twins Brothers” from the external position of “actual observations,” *A Few Particulars*

foregrounds a series of specific corrections to the public narrative that has thus far been written before “Chang-Eng” were able to publish “under their own direction.” The move from a totalizing history to the particulars of the story provides a rhetorical shift of emphasis that makes clear the importance of seemingly minor moments and frames as critical in the movement of the narrative. No longer reduced entirely to their staged name, “Chang-Eng, the United Siamese Brothers,” take on a rhetorical persona – individual men performing public roles. While the title does not go so far as to say that the biography was written by either of the brothers, as is sometimes assumed when critics have cited the narrative as evidence of their agency, it makes Chang and Eng out as the directors of their own life stories. In some measure, the idea of co-production also opens toward the consideration of the contested and constrained agency of Chang and Eng to contribute to the invention of their self narratives.

Chang’s and Eng’s particular account is framed as the privileged viewpoint to tell a truer story of their lives from lived perspective. Inverting the externalizing epistemology of the outside American and European observer who had never been to Siam or experienced living as conjoined twins, Hale writes Western colonial ignorance into the narrative, “The people of this country [United States] and Europe know very little about Siam, as the government [of Siam] only suffers Americans and Europeans to come to Bunkok,[sic] and they are not allowed to travel in the interior under any circumstances.”⁴²⁴ Recall that this prohibition by the Siamese royalty was at the crux of the rhetoric of curiosity recorded in the diaries British colonial merchants who first made contact with Chang and Eng on a fishing trip in restricted waters.⁴²⁵ In *A Few Particulars*, Western colonial

424 *A Few Particulars*, 3.

425 Barend Jan Terwiel, *Thailand's Political History: From the 13th Century to Recent Times*, (Bangkok: River Books, 2011). See Chapter 1 of this dissertation for further discussion of the colonial contexts of United States and British merchants’ access to various parts of territorial Siam as part of King Rama III’s constrained opening of engagement.

ignorance returns as the ethos for Chang's and Eng's narrative as (former) colonial subjects whose perspective begin from the interior of Siam.

The complexity of colonial perspective is complicated further as Hale contrasts the Western colonial perspective with the privileged Chinese colonial perspective. The Chinese "are allowed to trade with every port, and to travel through every part of the country," Hale writes. He concludes with the assertion that, "in fact, at least one half of the population of Siam are emigrants from China, and they have many more privileges than the natives."⁴²⁶ While the entire frame of Western colonial exclusion and Chinese colonial dominance in Siam could be read as an implicit critique of the conditions of free trade that animated government discussions of Siam-Chinese trade, it is striking how Hale positions Chang and Eng in this Chinese-Siamese colonial context. "Chang and Eng were born of Chinese parents," Hale writes, situating the brothers within the Chinese colonial class exempt from the tax and labor obligations of the "natives of Siam."⁴²⁷ Chang's and Eng's perspective was privileged because they had lived experience in the interiority of Siam, and because within that space of interiority they were superior to the natives of Siam.

If the titular changes between *An Historical Account* and *A Few Particulars* centers the shift in narrative authority and authorship, the similarities in design across both pamphlets title pages complicates colonial matters further. Allison Pingree notes the irony in the production of pamphlets of the *Siamese* twins' history printed with a cover image saturated in American iconography and political rhetoric.⁴²⁸ Recall that even in Hale's initial imaginations of a new narrative the Lorenzo Bowers woodcut was to imprint the cover. The woodcut of an eagle grasping

426 *A Few Particulars*, 3.

427 *A Few Particulars*, 4.

428 Allison Pingree, "America's 'United Siamese Brothers': Chang and Eng and Nineteenth-Century ideologies of Democracy and Domesticity," In *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 94-95.

“E Pluribus Unum” in its beak is one of the few elements of continuity across the production of Siamese Twins narratives. The “image ... was unmistakably American,” Pingree argues, citing the circulation of such iconography in coin impression in 1795 and the federal government’s Great Seal in 1782 and “E Pluribus Unum” had been taken up as a national motto in American political rhetoric.⁴²⁹ Pingree draws attention to the ironic juxtaposition of American iconography: Why were American government symbols appearing on exhibition narrative of conjoined Siamese brothers? In the context of the contested copyright in American law between two men, which becomes “secured” on the title page of *An Historical Account* by the 6th edition, the ironic distance Pingree reads into government document and exhibition pamphlets can be read as more congruous than previously assumed.

Pingree suggests one of the upshots of reading American political rhetoric of the 19th century through the exhibitions of the Siamese Twins is that it marks an earlier conjuncture to understand sectarian rhetoric of a nation divided that is usually associated with the American Civil War. While Pingree’s essay moves quickly across the materials produced by, for, and around the exhibitions of the Siamese twins, she notes a particular twist in the shift of motto that merits close attention. Pingree reads the shift from “United We Stand” to “Union and Liberty, one and inseparable, now and forever,” as evidence of the ways in which the public notoriety of Chang’s and Eng’s conjoined bodies were used for cultural and political communication in 1830s American discourse. struggling with changing configurations of government moving through sectarian anxieties around divided states within a united nation.⁴³⁰ *A Few Particulars* extends the intertextual symbolism between the Siamese Twins and American political discourse quoting Daniel

429 Pingree, “America’s ‘United Siamese Brothers,’” 92.

430 John Garraty, *A Short History of the American Nation*, 3rd ed, (New York: Harper & Row, 1981).

Webster's closing line from his defense of national tariffs in the 1830 U.S. Senate debates urging loyalty to the "sentiment, dear to every true American heart—Liberty *and* Union, now and forever, one and inseparable!"⁴³¹ Pingree persuasively suggests the particular inversion of the quotation from Webster, which "became immensely popular after the speech—even being printed in *McGuffey's Reader* and memorized by young children," makes clear the ways in which "patriotism is employed to sell the twins" and "the twins themselves are used to sell democratic nationalism."⁴³² The metaphorical symbolism of the conjoined brothers bodies were used in American public discourse and they made use of that same discourse to promote their public appearances. The complexity of those relationships was put to rhetorical use by cultivating a sense of curiosity to such complex accounts of the world. Chang-Eng were Chinese men appearing as Siamese Brothers in American exhibition rooms; and they were conjoined too.

431 *Speeches of Hayne and Webster in the United States Senate, on the Resolution of Mr. Foot*. January 1830. Also, Mr.. Webster's Celebrated Speech on the Slavery Compromise Bill, March 7, 1850. Boston: A. T. Hotchkiss & W. P. Fetridge, 1853: 83-84. As an archival note, I would add that James Hale brought Chang and Eng and Daniel Webster into conversation on at least one prior occasion. In a letter written to Harris, Chang and Eng on August 1st, 1832, Hale reads the meticulous care in which they crafted their case for separating from the Coffins as evidence they should give up the itinerant performance lifestyle and become lawyers.

I had the satisfaction of a hearty laugh this fore-noon, after reading your last two "gall bursters to Charles Locke. He was quite amused as well as astonished at the contents thereof. Charley thinks it would be well for you to quit your rambling sort of life, and after a few months study with [Daniel] Webster, presumes you would make an excellent pair of lawyers, you plead the case so well now." (Letter, James Hale to Friends Harris [and] Chang Eng, August 1, 1832. Gwyn Family Papers. North Carolina Collection. Wilson Library).

Again, treating the private correspondence and criticism of the Coffins as a tit-bit of afternoon gossip, Hale's suggestion that the brothers could take on a profession such as becoming lawyers rather than exhibiting themselves is an important particular because it refuses the exclusion of the brothers from more respectable work. However, the joking tenor makes the recommendation seem simultaneously absurd as is often the case with Hale's writing to and about Chang and Eng.

432 Pingree, "America's 'United Siamese Brothers'," 97, 94.

6.2.2 Laboring Men

In addition to reworking the orientalist representations of Hale's first effort, his account under Chang's and Eng's direction offers more detail on Chang's and Eng's early lives, reconstructing an image of the brothers as early entrepreneurs. A particular set of corrections center the early lives of Chang and Eng in Siam. As with the earlier narrative, *A Few Particulars* begins in an orientalist description of the Kingdom of Siam, its geographic location, its economic trade, and its political system.⁴³³ However, whereas in *An Historical Account* Hale detours into spectacular stories of the despotic and violent rule of the King of Siam as a foil for American democratic civility, in *A Few Particulars* emphasis is placed on explaining the details of trade between China and Siam. Hale's description of the junket trade is tied to a curious detour into the masculine privilege of movement and migration that were critical to economic agenda. While describing the junket trade between China and Siam, Hale writes, "Another very singular custom is, that a female is never allowed to make a passage in a junk; and in many cases in which females have got on board disguised in male attire, and have afterwards been discovered, they have invariably been thrown overboard."⁴³⁴ While the veracity of Hale's depiction is unclear, his anecdotal detour makes clear a relationship between colonial economy and the management of gender.

Centering the economic contexts of their early lives opens up a space for Chang and Eng to emerge as laboring men. Rachel Adams argues the "freak's labor" was "framed by a rhetoric

433 On the orientalist practices of cartographic narrative in the context of 19th century Siam see Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1994). For a close reading of *An Historical Account* as an interstitial narrative that lends itself to aggrandized enfreakment see Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

434 [James Hale], *An Historical Account*, 4-5; James Hale, *A Few Particulars*, 2-3.

and decency and common sense,” where the appeal to the audience is to pay to gaze – a break in social decorum – at those who would otherwise be unable to make a living wage. A moral rationalization of the economics of the viewing practices were tied to the assumption that freaks were “excluded from the realm of productive labor,” and thus, “the freak embodies the virtues of hard work and independence by becoming the source of a living wage.”⁴³⁵ In some ways, Chang’s and Eng’s lives and exhibitions could be read as exemplars of Adams’ notice of exceptional entrepreneurial performers who “transform” their designation as “objects of visual curiosity ... into a source of profit, creativity, and social critique.” Even so, Adams urges caution when reading materials produced in, and for, the freak show economy, in too redemptive of a light. Rather than reading the show biography as evidence of either Chang’s and Eng’s subjugation to the visual economy of the exhibition scene or as redemptive stories of their transforming self-narration, what I find most interesting are the details by which Chang’s and Eng’s labor is narrated to have begun in earnest before their first contact with the colonial merchant Robert Hunter *and* that they were enterprising successes laboring in the productive realm distinct from the western international curiosity economy that made profitable the public exhibition of racialized and disabled bodies as an entertainment for a curious paying public .

Chang’s and Eng’s exigency to labor is written into the drama of their boyhood development, when their father and several siblings died in a cholera outbreak when they were eight years old. While *An Account* only references their early occupations in Siam “facetiously” as “engaged in the duck and egg trade,” *A Few Particulars* details their work manufacturing coconut oil, peddling wares as roving merchants, and then rearing ducks and selling eggs as a means to

435 Rachel Adams, *Sideshow U.S.A.: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination*, (The University of Chicago Press, 2001): 14-15.

support their family.⁴³⁶ Hale's original dismissal of Chang's and Eng's early labor as comically unproductive is important, in part, because it is the pivot point to rationalize Abel Coffin's colonial contract as benevolent protection and appeal to the audience to pay to gaze on the brothers as racialized freaks. His correction repositions the brothers seriously within a recognizable self-made man narrative centers their abilities to labor, make a living, and provide for their family. Figured as laboring men, they were articulating a claim for self-possession that disassociated them from public discussion that framed their exhibitions in the language of slavery.⁴³⁷ As a corrective, Chang and Eng emerge as the truly benevolent agents sharing their reports and observations on the world they would travel and the people they would meet for a small fee to enter conversation with them.

6.2.3 Analyzing America in International Contexts: Comparative Curiosity

Beyond its aim to "correct" the "erroneous statements" in the "previous publications," *A Few Particulars* was written with a second purpose in mind: "to convey to the public some idea of the immense expanse of country which they [Chang and Eng] have encompassed in the last few years."⁴³⁸ As part of the genre bending and blending that constitutes the production of the freak show biography, *A Few Particulars* is an exemplar of early American travel writing. *An Historical Account*, which was sometimes slightly modified and updated to account for the travel of the Siamese Twins across its ten print editions, offers little account of the cultural milieus of those places through which they were traveling and exhibiting. *A Few Particulars*, on the other hand,

436 [James Hale], *An Historical Account*, 7-8; James Hale, *A Few Particulars*, 4-6.

437 Hales writes the separation from the Coffins: "After the twins returned from England, they continued to travel under the protection of the Captain, until the 1st of June 1832, when they became of age: up to that period the twins had derived no benefit from their exhibitions, &c.; but since that time they have been acting altogether on their own account" (7).

438 *A Few Particulars*, 1.

includes a more robust commentary on the worlds they were traveling that can be read as a bit of traveling ethnographic criticism. Usually presumed to be in the position of the one being stared at in the “high-stakes social interaction for everybody involved” in the staring situation, Chang and Eng were not only looked at, but they also looked back.⁴³⁹ Looking back in the context of the new show biography starts from the position that Chang and Eng have always been looking on their audiences across their traveling exhibitions and making judgments on the cultural and interpersonal exchanges they encountered along the way.

Understanding the complexity of curiosity is a political task as Perry Zurn argues in *Curiosity and Power: The Politics of Inquiry*.⁴⁴⁰ If Alexis de Tocqueville’s contemporary *Democracy in American* would become recognized as the most critical entry of traveling criticism turned political and social scientific treatise, *A Few Particulars* was likely read by thousands more in the United States during the 1830s and offers not only a comparative sense of the scaffolding of curiosity in historical context. It textures that scaffolding of curiosity by attuning to particular places and practices. In this section, I analyze the comparative international analysis of superstition, curiosity, and print cultures in *A Few Particulars* as both an under-examined account of American social life and as a strategic narrative that (re)positions Chang and Eng as ascendant gentleman.

In *A Few Particulars*, commonplace white colonial masculine tropes revolving around the boundaries of reason and superstition are placed in comparative relief. As with the earlier show biography and other public print accounts of the Siamese Twins, the 1836 pamphlet draws out colonial claims of Siamese superstition in order to convey a sense of the people and culture of

439 Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look*, (Oxford University Press, 2009): 84.

440 Perry Zurn, *Curiosity and Power: The Politics of Inquiry*, (Minnesota University Press, 2021):.2.

Siam. In addition to describing the complexity of colonial Chinese-Siamese economic trade, *A Few Particulars* describes the detailed preparation for the junk trade, with its “great attention to ‘times and seasons’,” including adherence to the “particular day” and “particular hour” for laying the keel for the boat and even a “particular time” to cut the tree for the mast of the boat, as potentially evidence of incongruity in Siamese economic rationality and cultural superstition.⁴⁴¹ However, unlike in earlier show biographies, this superstition is not confined to the practices of Siamese junk traders, but is commonplace across the Atlantic as well.

This superstitious adherence to particular days and hours appears very absurd in the detail, and many would be inclined to cry out—what superstition!!! What folly!!! And yet it is no worse than the twins themselves have met with in this country.⁴⁴²

While acknowledging superstitious behavior of some Siamese farmers and junk merchant’s attention to times and seasons, the orientalist silence that undergirds Hale’s first account is reframed by turning the gaze back upon peculiarities of American life. Furnishing examples from their travels, including an account of a Welsh family living in the Alleghany mountains planting potatoes in a severe rainstorm because, as “the old lady” of the house explained, “they were very anxious to finish the planting during the dark of the moon!!!,” the privileged perspective of the twins from their global travels spreads superstition as a commonplace across cultures and populations. Whereas Hale’s orientalist account works, in part, through leaving American life an unnamed and unmarked norm against which Siamese backwardness could be established, Chang and Eng are afforded some space to flip the script by marking the curious behavior of some in America as well. A premise of the conceptualization of co-production is that Chang and Eng’s input into the second narrative was taken into account by Hale in the crafting of the manuscript.

441 *A Few Particulars*, 3.

442 *A Few Particulars*, 3.

Importantly, the takeaway is not that Siamese are not superstitious or that their practices could be celebrated as grounded cultural knowledge, but instead to suggest that Chang and Eng were not defined by such incidents of superstition just as most of the American audiences they would encounter were not defined by the superstitious behaviors of some other Americans. Assuming a critical position toward such diffused appearances of superstition across their travels, Chang-Eng are strategically framed as reasonably aware that such behaviors are to be disassociated from all Americans in order to assume a common identification with some of their American audiences.

A Few Particulars similarly complicates and reframes the qualities and practices of curiosity throughout their lives and travels. Living lives that often required navigating public enfreakment of their bodies as curiosities, Chang and Eng were well situated to reflect back on the various constructions of those cultural practices of curiosity. In *A Few Particulars*, curiosity begins in Siam. Chang and Eng “excited a good deal,” Hale writes, as “many persons called at their father’s house to see them, especially when they were very young.”⁴⁴³ The King of Siam was also curious; “having signified a desire to see them,” the twins went to Bangkok and “saw not only his majesty, but also his seven hundred wives; some of whom made presents to the twins, as did likewise the king.”⁴⁴⁴ The account of Chang and Eng visiting the King of Siam and his wives was not new to *A Few Particulars*. Recall that *An Historical Account* also noted a meeting of the King of Siam and Chang and Eng. However, how those stories are told are notably different. In *An Historical Account*, Chang and Eng were called to the King of Siam who first wanted them killed because of his superstitious belief that they were signs of terror to come. Moreover, *An Historical Account* relays not only the sexual lives of the King and his wives but adds in a story of despotic

443 *A Few Particulars*, 5.

444 *A Few Particulars*, 5.

cruelty to counterpose the Siamese from American contexts of the reader. Most of that sensationalist curiosity of the imagined despotic Siam is eliminated from *A Few Particulars*. While the description of the King's vast harem may signify some orientalist sexual curiosity for the American reader, Chang's and Eng's visit is centered on a courteous exchange of gifts. While the details of the gifts are omitted, the practice of receiving gifts from royalty and social elite was a custom that circulated in curiosity scenes in Europe and America as well.

In addition to the changing circumstance of Chang and Eng in relation to their promotion of themselves as the Siamese Twins under their own direction, the economic and political dynamics of United States and Siamese relations were also changing. Rather than describe the despotism of the King of Siam, Hale writes in new Jacksonian entanglements that doubled as refutation of having been sold by their mother.

Since they left home, they have had several opportunities of hearing of their mother—the last time was in 1834, through the medium of a gentleman who was sent out in a U.S. frigate to Siam by President Jackson, to negotiate [sic] a treaty of commerce with the king, and who saw the mother of the twins, and was able to assure her of their having been in good health when he left the United States.⁴⁴⁵

If the failed efforts of the British to secure a favorable trade agreement with the King of Siam in the 1820s shaped the first narrative, the “Treaty of Amity and Commerce between Siam and the United States” (signed in 1833 and ratified in 1836) set out a different construction of the Kingdom of Siam as trading partners.⁴⁴⁶ Unremarked, but perhaps known by the audience, Andrew Jackson's envoy, led by Edmund Roberts, was also responsible for delivering diplomatic gifts,

445 *A Few Particulars*, 5-6.

446 Treaty of Amity and Commerce between Siam and the United States, signed at Sia-Yut'hia (Bangkok), March 20, 1833 (exchange copy); ratifications exchanged at Bangkok, April 14, 1836. National Archives, General Records of the United States Government. For a digital image see <https://prologue.blogs.archives.gov/2013/09/28/on-display-siamese-american-treaty-of-amity-and-commerce/>

including a sword and a set of coins to the King of Siam.⁴⁴⁷ Those gifts offer a political parallel to the gift exchange Chang and Eng had experienced years before. While the veracity of the claim that one of the members of Jackson's envoy spoke with their mother in Siam is unclear, the entanglement of the brothers' well-being in American-Siamese diplomacy offers a strategic positioning of their narrative as a bridge toward building connections between the nations. What holds both stories together is curiosity.

Curiosity is a global phenomenon in *A Few Particulars*, starting in Siam but appearing also in their travels of the United States and Europe. Read as a comparative cultural history of curiosity, *A Few Particulars* notably contrasts various expressions of curiosity. Hale writes, for example,

A good deal is sometimes said about Yankee curiosity, but Dutch curiosity goes a little ahead of it. Some Dutchmen, who, on being spoken to, seemed to be a little ashamed of so inquisitorial a system, defended it on the ground that many persons come into the country to act as spies, and furnish information to the Belgian government.⁴⁴⁸

Starting from the assumption that the audience is familiar with tropes of "Yankee curiosity," decades before Twain would come to capture its sense, Hale pushes the Dutch people ahead of such American inquisitiveness. Notably, too unbridled of an expression of curiosity is associated with a sense of shame. Recall that curiosity was not always celebrated, often still figured as sinful and dangerous. In the context of Dutch curiosity, however, the sense of shame from an overly curious engagement was rationalized through an entanglement with a violent border conflict with Belgium. Curiosity, expressed as inquisition, was not always culturally appropriate but in the extraordinary contexts of conflict, spies, and deceit it was rationalized as necessary.

447 For a digital display of those gifts see Royal Thai Embassy gallery: <https://thaiembdc.org/about-the-embassy/embassy-library/the-gallery/>. A more extensive analysis of the Edmund Roberts papers, 1803-1905 held at the Library of Congress may offer more depth to this account. (https://findingaids.loc.gov/db/search/xq/searchMferDsc04.xq?_id=loc.mss.eadmss.ms012093&_faSection=contentsList&_faSubsection=dsc&_dmdid=d59993e22&_start=1&_lines=125)

448 *A Few Particulars*, 10.

It was not only curiosity practices, but pace and papers that were markers of cultural difference for Chang and Eng in their travels. Arriving back in New York in 1836, Hale writes that “they were forcibly struck with the difference of bustle and business at New York, when contrasted with the quiet and stillness which prevail at Amsterdam.”⁴⁴⁹ Contrasting the intensity of the traveled streets, with its “bustle and business,” was one way that Chang and Eng felt and marked the cultural differences of their travels, but even more notable was that there “were only two newspapers” in Amsterdam whereas in “New York they are almost numberless.”⁴⁵⁰ It was in these bustling and publishing contexts that *A Few Particulars* was printed. In New York, the brothers had the opportunity to print their own story (again), but their account would have to compete with the sea of print that drew readers’ attention.

In this section, I analyzed moments of superstition, curiosity, and print bustle as important comparative points of cultural distinction as marked by Chang and Eng in their travels as the Siamese Twins. Whereas earlier representations of Chang and Eng centrally gazed at the brothers and their extraordinary bodies and exoticized nationality, *A Few Particulars* makes use of the brothers’ looking back at those people and places they traveled. Read as a bit of travel writing ethnographic criticism, Hale writes against his earlier narrative to globalize the tendency toward superstition and curiosity across their travels while noting particular differences in their expressions based on political, economic, and cultural contexts. As ethnographic critics, Chang and Eng are assumed to have a privileged perspective watching the various expressions of human difference afforded by their travel, however the narrative doubles to reframe earlier public discourse as well. Chang and Eng are represented as part of the reasonable class, men worthy of

449 *A Few Particulars*, 11.

450 *A Few Particulars*, 11.

entanglement with matters of political diplomacy and the production of their own stories. As part of the genre blend that is the early American freak show biography, the assertion of their own perspective put into print signified their gentlemanly ascent as much as their dress or exhibition performance.

6.3 Adopting an American Style

Abel Coffin and James Hale had commissioned the production of an image of the “Siamese Twins Brothers” in a Victorian parlor in 1830 and had included that image in the print of *An Historical Account* since 1831. In his letter describing the new narrative to the brothers in 1833, Hale saw a need to produce a new image for the new biography. Reproduced through a copper plate that had broken over time, the image constructed by Samuel Maverick, had become entangled with the copyright dispute that he was navigating with Abel Coffin. Instead, Hale encouraged the twins to invest in a “very superior wood engraving,” which at the cost of \$50, he assured the brothers would be cost effective “because the expense of printing from it would be $\frac{1}{4}$ as much as from metal,” it would “wear longer,” and it would enable the group to make full length “stereotype copies” for sale at a cheaper per print cost than any other medium.⁴⁵¹ Hale not only wanted to take

451 James Hale to Charles Harris with Siamese Twins, May 17, 1833. [NCSA] Thurmond Chatham Papers Historical and Family Papers, 1776-1955. Letters to and Notes of Siamese Twins and Dr. Charles Harris 1831-1844(?) 25 Items. Around the same time that he proposed the new narrative, Hale was also looking to switch printers. While the very earliest dated (1829) edition of *An Historical Account* appears to have been printed by W. Turner in London, every other edition of the biography written after that period (1831-1836) up to the publication of *A Few Particulars* (1836) was printed by Elliot and Palmer in New York. Chang and Eng trusted Elliot and Palmer to be responsible stewards in their part of the production of the Siamese Twins biographies, as indicated by their request for Susan Coffin to send the brothers’ belongings to Elliot and Palmer’s address in New York at the apex of their separation from the Coffins. Given the confidence Chang and Eng displayed in the conduct of Elliot and Palmer, Hale’s suggestion to change printers required him to explain the rationale for the shift. Hale offer two arguments for why the *A Few Particulars* should shift printers. First, Hale suggested he could get a better arrangement in terms of cost of bulk printing. As Elliot

advantage of the changing visual print technologies and economies, he sought to separate the image of the Siamese Twins from the narrative that had been constructed under the direction of the Coffins. The qualities of the book, the type of paper and mode of image production, were as important to Hale as the qualities of the story he was crafting. Despite Hale's appeal for a new image in 1833, *A Few Particulars* reused the image that had been used since the early aggrandizing enfreakment of The Siamese Brothers since their exhibitions in London in 1830.

Samuel Maverick's sketch of the "Siamese Brothers" is an exemplar of visual aggrandizing enfreakment. First sketched in 1830, Samuel Maverick's image represents the brothers as young boys, visually moving from a receding tropical setting associating the brothers with Siam and into the Victorian parlor and the games of gentleman. Maverick's not-yet-complete hand drawn sketch invites the audience to complete the picture. However, their imagination is guided by the narrative which suggests that the brothers "have adopted the American style of dress in everything except the hair, which is three feet in length, and is worn by them braided in the Chinese style."⁴⁵² By contrast, the 1839 lithograph depicts "Chang-Eng" as young men emerging fully dressed in the style of an American gentleman and centering themselves in the parlor setting. Residues of Siam have been eliminated from not only their self-naming, but their image as well as from the setting to the cutting of their hair. With Siam out of sight, the icons of integration into American boyhood also are eliminated or recede, as the chess board is backgrounded to the image of the brothers writing themselves into the world as men with their life story held in their own hand. While *A Few*

was charging \$35 for the printing of 1,000 copies of the pamphlet, sometimes up to \$40, Hale was sure he could get Bowers below that \$35 mark, maximizing the profit of the exhibition sales. Second, and as interesting for a materialist rhetorical analysis, Hale argued that the quality of Elliot and Palmer's work – their paper and ink – had started to decline. Upon receipt of the 9th edition of *An Historical Account*, Hale felt certain that "if Bowers does them[,] they are not to be done on such scandalous paper as Elliot's," which he describes as "like brown paper." Even concerned with being drawn into the scandal of public opinion, given the amount of work that the show biography does for the exhibition the quality of the materials were reflections of the qualities of those it represented between its pages.

452 *A Few Particulars*, 13.

Particulars eventually uses the same plate image as *An Historical*, by the end of the decade one of the most popularly circulated images of the Siamese Twins marked their integration into American visual culture.



Figure 10 Left Image: Samuel Maverick, Plate engraving from drawn sketch, “Siamese Twin Brothers,” New York, printed in J. Hale, *A Few Particulars*, 1836

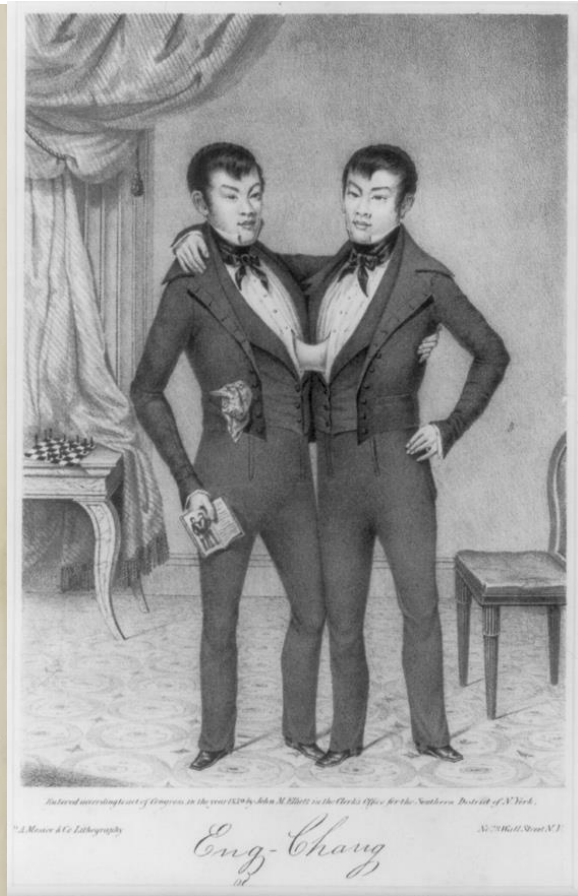


Figure 11 Right Image: A. Mester & Co. Lithography, Lithograph, “Eng-Chang,” 1839.
[//www.loc.gov/item/2003671771](http://www.loc.gov/item/2003671771)

It is notable that despite this copyright entanglement between Abel Coffin and James Hale about the rights to the narrative and image of the Siamese Twins, it would be printer John Elliot who is recorded as the individual submitting the new narrative and image of the Siamese Twins as an act of U.S. Congress.⁴⁵³ Even more illuminating is the legal fact that Chang and Eng could not enter their own narrative or image into the public record by that very same act of Congress that restricted such rights to a circumscribed few. If they could not submit their account of themselves for public record by themselves, their account books offer a private rejoinder to their exclusion from public recognition.

6.4 Conclusion

Chang's and Eng's separation from their dependence on the Coffin's not only shifted their public recognition as men on their own it also became an important shift in the representation and narrative that accompanied the production of the Siamese Twins exhibitions. Irving Wallace and Amy Wallace have cited the brothers' separation from the Coffin's and the publication of the 1836 show biography as evidence of Chang's and Eng's voice, agency, and autonomy. Published under a title that emphasized that it was produced "by themselves" and then "under their own direction," *A Few Particulars* has been read as evidence that confirms their assertion of themselves as self-made men. In this chapter, I have sought to critically contextualize the claim that the show biography ought to be read as evidence of either Chang's and Eng's voice or confirmation that they were in fact self-made men. Against the self-made men myth, the contexts of the production

453 The text beneath the image reads: "Entered according to act of Congress in the year 1839 by John M. Elliot in the Clerk's Office for the Southern District of New York."

of the “Siamese Twins, under their own direction” was the work of more than just Chang and Eng. It was a co-production of work including Charles Harris and James Hale. That is to say, the self-made man narrative was a construction of many men.

In the first section of this chapter, I analyzed closely a series of letters that outline the contested copyright between Abel Coffin and James Hale to the first Siamese Twins show biography, *An Historical Account*, that became an important sticking point in the brothers’ efforts to profit from the exhibition of themselves as “their own men.” The freak show biography had economic, ideological, and material cultural uses that made their production an essential component of the public exhibitions of the Siamese Twins. Abel Coffin’s assertion to the legal rights of the first narrative highlights his asymmetric power to craft and profit from the brothers’ narrative, even after their separation. While James Hale’s concern with the expense of the legal battle over the copyright with Abel Coffin suggests he too was positioned asymmetrically to the Coffin’s within the context of copyright law, his capacity to choose to circumvent the copyright and produce a new narrative for publication also makes clear the power of white citizenship in the constitution of the intellectual property rights. That Chang and Eng could not be recognized as submitting their own story for publication brings into relief the ways in which the rhetoric and structure of copyright law required their continued reliance on white men to craft, publish, and sale their narrative. Even so, Chang and Eng had already started to produce a counter-narrative to what was written in *An Historical Account* and before Hale finished writing *A Few Particulars*. In that space between the brothers’ separation from the Coffins (1832) and the publication of the new show biography (1836), the Siamese Twins performances highlighted that they were out on their own and began a concerted effort to reframe the exhibition narrative as evidence of their possessive individualism. From those contested copyright contexts, a close reading of the textual corrections

in *A Few Particulars* makes clear how the co-production of the new biography sought to position both Hale as the rightful owner of the Siamese Twins narrative and the effort to reframe the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng as confirming evidence of their gentlemanly ascendance.

In the second section of this chapter, I offered a close reading of the textual shifts from *An Historical Account* to *A Few Particulars* to trace the ways in which masculinity – configured through stories of labor and intelligence – becomes a critical component in reframing the Siamese Twins as self-made men in the context of 1830s American life. Allison Pingree and Cynthia Wu have also read the Siamese Twins show biographies within the political contexts of their 1830s American production. Pingree suggests that Chang and Eng used antebellum sectarian American anxiety to amplify the curiosity in their exhibition, but they were also used by American audiences to work through those anxieties. Wu suggests that by postbellum period the cultural contexts of emerging American empire overdetermined their personal signification through the production of their own narrative. While neither Pingree nor Wu considered the actual ownership of the copyright to their exhibition narrative, they both push the need to read the Siamese Twins show biographies critically and contextually as evidence of something more than their autonomous individualism. I share Pingree's assessment that the show biographies both rhetorically draw from American cultural life and contribute to that milieu. And while Wu's postbellum claim that cultural over-determination shapes the brothers' exhibitions following emancipation, in 1836 the new show biography suggests that the brothers were able to use narrative particulars to craft space for their contested integration into American life despite racial, classed, and ableist cultural constraints. While *A Few Particulars* does not break with the form of the freak show biography, including the use of medical experts to confirm the testimony within, attention to the details of the narrative

shifts make clear how within that form there are important differences that shaped the roles Chang and Eng could play in American social life.

The Siamese Twins exhibitions from 1829 to 1839 reflect a constant reconstruction of their image to not only attract audiences' curiosity, but also to manage their own integration into American life. I conclude the chapter through a visual rhetorical analysis of the changing image of the Siamese Twins from 1836 to 1839, as the brothers are represented as having fully adopted an American style. In this final visual shift, perhaps most symbolically associated with the cutting of their hair, Chang and Eng figured themselves as American men and set the stage for their leaving the stage. In 1839, Chang and Eng (along with Charles Harris), retired from their itinerant exhibition life as the Siamese Twins and settled in North Carolina. Having become globally recognized as the Siamese Twins, the brothers sought out the solitude and pleasure of rural life in North Carolina but continued to complicate the expected dynamics of self-made men in America. In the final movement of this project, I will follow Chang and Eng as they transition themselves from the stage to settlers ascending into the slave owning Southern American aristocracy.

In a series of impossible acts, Chang and Eng would become citizens of the United States when citizenship was restricted to white land owning men, they married white sisters when North Carolina miscegenation laws made such acts illegal, and each raised large families supported by their ownership and sale of enslaved black men, women, and children. While the narrative adjustments of the production of the Siamese Twins exhibition narrative became an important part of the argument for their inclusion into American life, Chang's and Eng's integration was often contested and never absolute. As the final exhibitions after the emancipation of enslaved black individuals in the United States would indicate, the Siamese Twins could variously be the objects of admiration for their success as self-made men as much as fear and disdain for their monstrous

presence where their monstrosity was figured through normative ideas of the autonomous body, whiteness, and changing practices of masculinity.

7.0 Chapter 6: Asymptotic Inclusions: Citizenship, Marriage, and Slavery in Chang and Eng Bunker's North Carolina Settlement, Domestic Lives, and Exhibitions (1839-1874)

Over the course of a decade, Chang and Eng had become the most recognized Asian men in America. However, Chang's and Eng's lives and exhibitions from their retirement from public in 1839 to their passing in 1874 offer further complexity to the progressive narrative of conjoined twins from Siam becoming international celebrities. Among the most exceptional aspects of Chang's and Eng's lives is the ways in which they seemed to have marshalled their status and experience exhibiting as the Siamese Twins into their inclusion into white American sociality after their decade of touring. In a confounding series of events, Chang and Eng became settler citizens of the United States at a time when such privileges were restricted to free white persons (1839), married white women at a time when such inter-racial relationships were criminalized (1843), and integrated themselves into the slaveholding elite when only a few years earlier they had been framed as slaves themselves (1843). For some, these events signified an exceptional story within the archive of the American Dream: only in the land of the free that was America could conjoined twins from Siam become so successful and live such prosperous lives!⁴⁵⁴ White, able-bodied, heteronormative settler conceptions of American success—status as men of good moral character, owning land, economic mobility, marriage, and children—had been a driving rhetorical force in the changing representations of Chang and Eng as the Siamese Twins in the 1830s and were amplified as the brothers materialized those aspirations in the 1840s and 50s. Chang and Eng

454 Stevie Larson, "Making Exceptions: Rethinking Success through the Lives of the Siamese Twins," *Amerasia Journal*, 39:1, 2013: 60-74.

Bunker had further established their position as iconic figures in the history of American success stories.

Several questions animate this chapter. How were Chang and Eng conferred citizenship given that the legal framework set out in the 1790 Naturalization Act restricted citizenship to “free white persons”? What can help explain how Chang’s and Eng’s marriages to white sisters, Sarah, and Adelaide Yates, were legally and religiously sanctioned given the federal and state laws prohibiting interracial marriages? How is it that Chang and Eng could come to own at least 30 individuals when only ten years earlier they had been perceived as slaves themselves? And what can we learn about conceptions of nation, race, disability, masculinity, and class given these exceptional inclusions of Chang and Eng into such an elite Southern American community? How did the curious public respond to these seemingly contradictory events? How were these exceptional inclusions contested, by whom, and toward what ends? Finally, how did changing cultural, political, economic, and social factors locally, nationally, and internationally impact the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that Chang and Eng navigated in this period?

Across these questions is an interest in both how Chang and Eng framed their inclusion into American life and how audiences responded to those frames in various ways. I am interested in marking the shifts and changes of both frames and responses to record the complexity that undergirds such dynamics of personal and cultural exchange. Rather than attempt to recreate either a linear progress narrative of Chang and Eng as American successes or reproduce the critical narrative of the brothers as victims of an intolerant American society, what is most curious—and significant—in this archive is how such narratives seem to obfuscate breaks of continuity, contested perspectives, and the everyday lives and practices of those navigating a story that exceeds their own creation.

To respond to these questions, I have gathered an extensive archive of legal documents, census records, letters from Chang and Eng to their families and friends, texts and images constructed for their exhibition tours, family photographs, a political cartoon, and United States and British newspapers referring to the Siamese Twins from 1839-1874. Attempting to unpack the complex, contested, and changing dynamics of inclusion of Chang and Eng into a Southern plantation and slave owning elite class requires such a motley collection of artifacts to analyze to glean a sense of the various voices and interests that were involved. Reading artifacts produced from the perspective of the brothers for different audiences—friends and family, the court, and various curiosity seeking publics—offers a layered texture to the ways in which Chang and Eng framed themselves and navigated their changing circumstances. Alongside those materials an archive of the public responses to Chang’s and Eng’s lives—even as they attempted to leave the public eye—offer a refraction of the changing cultural ideas about nations, race, masculinity, disability, class, and sexuality. Analyzing the public discourses around the Siamese Twins, including their contestations and changes, offers one way to understand how various audiences made use of Chang’s and Eng’s lives to navigate larger cultural controversies. Gathering such an archive provides a repository for a prismatic understanding of 19th century American rhetoric, disability, race, and gender. Recognizing the impossibility of fully capturing “Chang’s and Eng’s voice,” the purposeful act of archiving, analyzing, and representing these materials is meant to congeal together the ideological and discursive contexts and practices that mark changing relationships of power over the 19th century. It is clear that such ideological and discursive practices do not easily congeal at all, as discrepancies and gaps between customary norms and actual practices continue to appear.

From this archive, I offer the concept of asymptotic inclusion to help name the ways in which Chang and Eng appear to have increasingly integrated into American life without ever fully securing such a position. In analytic geometry, an asymptote is a line that continually approaches a given curve but does not meet it at any finite distance.⁴⁵⁵ While the fixed line that infinitely approaches a curve on a prefigured geometric plane enables mathematical analysis of an asymptote, in the context of the mess of theorizing social dynamics of inclusion and exclusion the asymptote appears less static and more processual. Asymptotic inclusion, then, is less a reference to the mathematical geometry in social analysis, than it is a willful stealing away of the conceptual clues that such geometric figurations could offer in thinking about social and cultural relationships that are neither produced on a neutral grid nor a fixed formula. As a figure for thinking about dynamics of social and cultural inclusion the asymptote may help to conceptualize the various ways in which such processes are sometimes neither absolute nor complete. Asymptotic inclusion often appears in rhetorical discourses that appeal to the sameness of the self with the other but are qualified by “except for” language. For example, Chang and Eng are the same as me, except for their bodily connection to each other. Or Chang and Eng are the same as me, except for being born in Siam. Chang and Eng may adopt an American style, settle a home in America, become American citizens, marry American women, father American children, and generally occupy a position of respect by the American public—all of which are suggestive of the inclusion of Chang and Eng into American life—there is simultaneously a consistent set of exceptions that prevent the brothers from being recognized as Americans.

This chapter proceeds chronologically. In the first part, I will analyze the integration of Chang and Eng into American settler citizenship. I analyze the brothers’ choice to settle in Wilkes

455 “Asymptote.” Oxford Languages.

County, North Carolina (1838-1839). Then I analyze the brothers' petition to be recognized with the surname "Bunker" (1839). Finally, I analyze the Bunker's petition for citizenship (1839). In the second part, I analyze the domestic lives of the Bunker's in Wilkes and Surrey Counties, starting with brothers' marriages (1843) and roles as slaveholders (1843-1865), before I analyze the brothers' roles as fathers of two households. In third section of this part about Chang's and Eng's roles as fathers, I analyze the brothers' return exhibitions as the "Chang and Eng Bunker, the Siamese Twins with their children" in 1849, 1853, and 1860. In the final part of the chapter, I analyze the brothers' lives and exhibitions through the Civil War until their deaths in 1874. I analyze the representations of the Siamese Twins bodies as a visual metaphor for the national American conflict, the post-war tours of the Siamese Twins in the principle northern cities of the United States (1866) and Great Britain (1868-1869), and finally, the brothers' deaths (1874). Analyzing the last 25 years of Chang's and Eng's lives offers a site for interrogating the changing relationships of power, nation, race, gender, disability, class, and sexuality in antebellum and postbellum America. While the afterlives of the Siamese Twins continue to suggest the interest in, and importance of, attending to the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng this chapter concludes my close analysis of their lives and exhibitions in the historical contexts that they lived.

7.1 Good American Men: Chang and Eng Bunker's Settler Citizenship

In 1839, Chang and Eng seemed to have made the decision to retire from their lives traveling for exhibitions and had chosen to settle in Wilkes County, a small, rural community in northwestern North Carolina. Chang and Eng were not alone in their move to settle in Wilkes County. Charles Harris—the manager that Susan Coffin had brought on board to replace James Hale

in 1831, who had relayed the angry messages of Chang and Eng as they separated from the Coffins and stayed with the brothers as they exhibited themselves under their own direction—had decided to settle alongside the brothers in North Carolina too.⁴⁵⁶ Wilkes County was established in the Carolina piedmont up to the Blue Ridge Mountains. Early settlers included veterans of American wars with Indians and the British that seemed attracted by the potential of its natural resources. Yet, by the 1830s, Wilkes County was like many other parts of Carolina. Many in the local area had started to face constraint on its agricultural, manufacturing, and educational opportunities and sought opportunities elsewhere.⁴⁵⁷ For Chang and Eng, and their trusted manager Charles Harris, however, the distance from the opportunities in growing urban America seemed to draw them to the boggy Carolina Piedmont. The archive of the Siamese Twins is instructive in helping to explain why the brothers chose to stop exhibiting and settle in rural Southern America, as they sought to distance themselves from the tiresome travel of exhibition and prying eyes and bustle of the major cities. In their efforts to “settle for life,” the brothers began the process of purchasing land, opening a general store, and cultivating a farm.

As recognized land owning settlers in the Carolina piedmont the stage was set for their petition to adopt the anglicized surname “Bunker” and apply for American citizenship. While I engage with the speculation about the origins of the Bunker name, I center the language of individualism in their petition to mark the ways in which the brothers sought to not only become recognized as Americans (through adoption of an anglicized surname that was a requirement of

⁴⁵⁶ Harris, himself an Irish immigrant, had steadily accumulated wages from the brothers as their acting manager and seemed prepared to work into a more stable routine. He became enmeshed with the Wilkes County elite, first as an intermediary to fine wares from New York, and later marshalling his knack for letter management by taking on the role of postmaster general. He also married a Yates and continued to communicate with Chang and Eng.

⁴⁵⁷ Mitchell *Diary of a Geological Tour*; Shrader, “William Lenoir, 1751-1839,” 206-8; Joan E. Cashin, *A Family Venture*; Brown, “The Emergence of Urban Society,” Melish, *Disowning Slavery*; Takaki, *Iron Cages*.

citizenship), but rhetorically individuate themselves as Chang Bunker and Eng Bunker. The importance of taking on the Bunker name is coupled with the brothers' attempts to assert themselves as recognizable individuals. Before Chang and Eng, or Charles Harris, could truly approach the position of settler, however, they had appealed for U.S. citizenship.

In a confounding bit of legal history, Chang and Eng were granted citizenship even though the 1790 Naturalization Act—the holding law that set out the conditions of citizenship in the United States in the 1830s—restricted citizenship to “free white persons.” What does the inclusion of Chang and Eng Bunker, generally known as the Siamese Twins, into the American citizenry suggest about the contested and changing boundaries of whiteness? It is not only Chang's and Eng's petition for citizenship, but Charles Harris's as well that might help trace the moving boundaries of whiteness in American political life. Chang's and Eng's inclusion into American settler citizenship attracted the attention of a curious public that longed to know what came of the conjoined brothers that had figured so prominently in the 1830s. As the news of the brothers' citizenship circulated nationally, the curious public took to imagining the troubles of conjoined twins exercising their rights as citizens to vote and what such a vote would mean for a democratic republic imagined through a one person, one vote logic. What becomes clear is that despite Chang's and Eng's efforts to settle outside of the public eye, newspapers exploded each time they experienced a significant life event. In each of these bursts of national coverage the inclusion of the brothers into the American imaginary continued to be contested.

7.1.1 Chang and Eng: American Settlers

It is not entirely clear how or why Chang and Eng choose to transition from their lives on the road traveling from city to city and to settle in Wilkes County. Historian Joseph Orser suggests

the plan was “well-orchestrated,” with records of a lead man for their exhibitions surveying the opportunity to purchase land in the area and speculates that they were attracted by the “sizeable medical community.”⁴⁵⁸ While Chang and Eng clearly developed relationships with the medical community along their exhibitions, such an appeal does not seem to be a driving motivating factor given the range of cities they could have lived in with an even more extensive professional medical network. Along with many of the commentaries produced about Chang and Eng in the 1840s, it seems more likely that the brothers’ desire for privacy and space to hunt drove their decision.⁴⁵⁹ Perhaps *A Few Particulars* offers the greatest clue, noting that “[Chang and Eng] enjoy themselves a great deal more in the country than they can in the cities and large towns, as in the country they can put a gun on their should, and wander into the woods far enough to be free from all annoyance; whereas in a city they can only take exercise in a carriage.”⁴⁶⁰ In her autobiography, Kay Hunter also offers some context in a letter from Chang Eng to her grandfather, Robert Hunter, in which the brothers write of their settlement in North Carolina and affairs of the heart.

We hope you will write to us as soon as you find leisure after the receipt of this. We have not travelled any since the month of July 1839, but we have bought some land in this country, and raise our own corn and hogs – we enjoy ourselves pretty well, but have not as yet got married. But we are making love pretty fast, and if we get a couple of nice wives we will be sure to let you know about it. ... We live way off in the back wood at the foot of the mountains called The Blue Ridge – in a very healthy country within 25 miles of the State of Virginia and fifty miles from the state of Tennessee. We have wood and water in great abundance and our neighbors are all on an equality, and none are very rich – people live comfortably, but each man tills his own soil. You will form a good idea of how much we are in the back woods when we tell you that we are upwards of 300 miles from the seaport town and 180 miles from any railroad. So we are quite removed from the march of intellect.⁴⁶¹

458 Orser, *Lives of Chang and Eng* 77; 79.

459 Carlina Watchman (Salisbury, NC), December 24, 1842. M.L.F. [Martha Lenoir Finley] to Caroline L. Gordon, December 18, 1842, Gordon-Hackett Papers, SHC; Robert C. Martin to Chang and Eng Bunker, January 27, 1848, Chang and Eng Bunker Papers, SHC.

460 *A Few Particulars*, 7.

461 Letter, Chang Eng to Robert Hunter, November 15, 1842. Hunter, *The Duet*, 80-1.

In Wilkes County, the brothers found the open space to live the lives they preferred to live.

Regardless of their reasoning, Chang and Eng began to settle in quickly. At some point between their arrival and 1840, the brothers had opened a (shortly lived) general store. Trying their hand at another line of work, the account book from the general show suggests they had begun to develop relationships, at least commercial, with the individuals and families in the country.⁴⁶² By the end of the year, Chang and Eng seemed prepared to settle. A December 9th, 1840, notice of receipt from the North Carolina Treasury office records their purchase of “100 acres of land” in Wilkes County for “the sum of five dollars.”⁴⁶³ With 100 acres the brothers likely felt more comfortable now that they had the space to wander and hunt in privacy and away from the bustle, crowds, and newspapers of the city. Over the next year, the brothers would build their first home on that land. An undated photograph of the home, a white two-story colonial with a striking porch set overlooking an expanse of land, suggests it was constructed to give them space to grow into their lives in rural North Carolina.⁴⁶⁴

Despite their distance from the newspapers in the major cities Chang’s and Eng’s lives continued to attract national attention. A Boston newspaper noted that, while “there are very few persons who know what has become of Chang and Eng, or where they are,” they could be “gratified to learn that they have ‘settled down for life,’ on a fine farm in Trapp Hill, a post town in Wilkes County, N.C.” According to the paper, Chang and Eng had “write[en] us that they are delighted with their farming operations, and are as happy as lords.”⁴⁶⁵ Chang’s and Eng’s happiness (and

462 “General store account book,” circa 1840, Chang and Eng Bunker Papers #3761, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

463 “Receipt of payment for 100 acres in Wilkes County,” North Carolina Treasury Office, No. 348. December 9, 1840. In the Chang and Eng Papers, Folder 2 – 1840-1854 and undated, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

464 “Home of Chang and Eng Bunker in Wilkes County, N.C.” Photograph in the Chang and Eng Bunker Papers #3761, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

465 “The Siamese Twins,” *Hartford Daily Courant*, (Hartford, Connecticut), 7-25-1840. Page [2].

capacities) in their new settler lives as farmers in North Carolina became national news. Despite their distance, the happening of Chang's and Eng's everyday lives had continued to be a curiosity for a national public. In fact, it would seem as though most of their significant life events (becoming citizens, getting married, having children) did not escape public attention. For example, the brothers made headlines in the New York and Boston when reports that that they had purchased a farm in North Carolina surfaced, and again in Philadelphia after their petition for citizenship.⁴⁶⁶ Chang's and Eng's inclusion into American life always seemed to approach acceptance, but never ultimately reach that impossible position as the public enfreakment of their everyday lives followed them from the stage to their farms.

466 Headline- [New-York Gazette; Siamese; Twins; North-Carolina]; Article Type- News/Opinion Newport Mercury, published as The Newport Mercury. (Newport, Rhode Island); "The Siamese Twins," *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), 07-20-1840. Page [2]; Headline- [Chang and Eng. North Carolina; American]; Article Type- News/Opinion Public Ledger (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), 11-28-1839, Page [2].

7.1.2 Introducing Chang Bunker and Eng Bunker

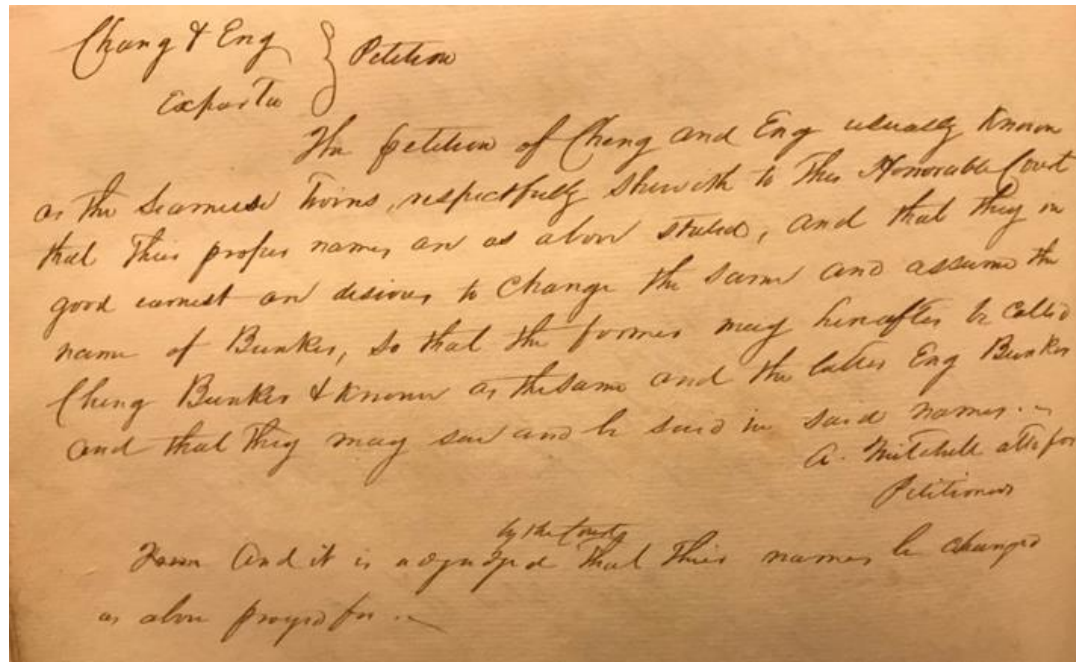


Figure 12 “Chang and Eng Petition for Bunker Surname,” 1839.

Around the same time as their petition for citizenship, Chang and Eng petitioned the state to be recognized with the surname “Bunker.”⁴⁶⁷ Chang’s and Eng’s surname petition was submitted to the court by “A. Mitchell,” an attorney that they had used in several instances before.

The petition of Chang and Eng usually known as the Siamese Twins, respectfully submit to this Honorable Court that their proper names are as above stated, and that they in good earnest and desire to change the same and assume the name of Bunker, so that the former may henceafter [sic] be called Chang Bunker [and] known as the same and the later Eng Bunker and that they may say and be said in the said names.⁴⁶⁸

The Wilkes County Court record concludes “it is agreed that their names be changed as above,” recognizing for the first time Chang and Eng as “the Bunkers.” Curiosity over how the brothers choose the “Bunker” surname have been of prominent interest to popular and academic historians

⁴⁶⁷ At the time of their naturalization the adoption of a recognized surname was reportedly a condition of their oath of allegiance.

⁴⁶⁸ Surname Petition. Wilkes County Court Records.

alike. While it is not the case that the brothers simply accepted the “suggestion of a bystander, Fred Bunker” to guide their decision, it is the case that Chang and Eng had developed a relationship with a family in New York with the surname “Bunker” and that was potentially the basis for their decision.⁴⁶⁹ For example, an 1831 letter from James Hale to Susan Coffin on June 14, 1831 relays that he and Chang and Eng had gone to “see Mrs. Bunker, whom [they] found extremely well.”⁴⁷⁰ From this archival trace, it seems plausible that the brothers legally adopted the surname Bunker “in honor of a lady in New York who treated them with great kindness,” as J.N. Moreheid asserts in his booklet on the domestic lives of Chang and Eng.⁴⁷¹ And in an 1844 letter written by James Hale to Charles Harris, years after they had settled in North Carolina, Hale inquires about Chang and Eng who had reportedly “never written” him and “ceased corresponding with all their former friends,” including “Bunker” who told Hale “he has not heard from them for months” and leaving a forwarding address (146 Front St. N York) by which the Bunkers could be reached.⁴⁷² In 1848, it seemed clear that Chang and Eng had continued to keep a close relationship with “Mr. Bunker” who acted as a banker and helped to manage the brothers’ investments that were critical to their growing family.⁴⁷³ In 1853, it seems as though the brothers had kept an active trade with “Mr. B.

469 William S. Powell. “Bunker, Eng and Chang” *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, vol. 6. 1979. <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/bunker-eng-and-chang>

470 Letter James Hale to Susan Coffin, June 14, 1831. James W. Hale and Susan A. Coffin Papers, William L. Clements Library, The University of Michigan.

471 J.N. Moreheid, *Lives, Adventures, Anecdotes, Amusements, and Domestic Habits of the Siamese Twins* (Raleigh, NC: E.E. Barclay, 1850). From this archival trace the story has become sensationalized so that the “generosity” of Mrs. Bunker is re-narrated in an aspirational romance between Chang and one of the Bunker daughters, Catherine, even as there is no explicit record of this relationship (See Duggan, *The Romance* and Wallace and Wallace, *The Two*). It is perhaps telling that the first daughter of Chang and Eng was named Catherine, possibly after the young Bunker woman in New York.

472 Letter James Hale to Charles Coffin, March 14, 1844. [NCSA] Thurmond Chatham Papers Historical and Family Papers, 1776-1955. Letters to and Notes of Siamese Twins and Dr. Charles Harris 1831-1844(?).

473 Letter, R.C. Martin to Chang and Eng Bunker, January 27, 1848. Chang and Eng Bunker Papers # 3761, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In this letter, R.C. Martin writes to Chang and Eng with regret that he had missed visiting them in their home and asking for assistance in obtaining a line of credit with “your friend and Banker Mr. Bunker, requesting him to either give me a letter of credit on some

Bunker” who was due to pay a claim to the brothers based on some speculative investments on copper.⁴⁷⁴ In a final reference, Robert Gilmer notes that he would send a duplicate of his letter pertaining to matters of the Bunkers’ financial affairs “to the care of Bunkers & Co. N.Y,” suggesting that their relationship with the Bunkers lasted at least until near the end of their lives.⁴⁷⁵ Chang and Eng continued to have a working relationship with the Bunkers throughout at least the 1850s and given the importance of their investments in New York for the overall health of their family’s livelihood it is perhaps reasonable to conclude that the Bunker surname was an homage to this strong and enduring relationship.

While speculative interest in the choice of the Bunker surname continues to linger as a curiosity, the petition to adopt a surname—and the choices to frame that appeal—are suggestive of a clearer rhetorical matter tied to their changing nominalism in relation to their inclusion into American society. Adopting the anglicized surname, a Christianizing demand of citizenship, suggests that their style and performance could be solidified in such a maneuver. Moreover, what I find most interesting about the appeal, is the way that the surname works to individuate the brothers from each other. Whereas they signed their petition for citizenship—and some of their exhibition materials—Chang Eng (or sometimes Chang-Eng), their petition for name recognition starts from the language of two brothers (Chang and Eng) and follows through as each are afforded individual recognition (Chang Bunker and Eng Bunker) that is concealed by the staged naming of

house in Europe or assist me in getting one,” before adding a bit about “Tom Thumb is the Lion of the City at present” and the health of the city.

474 Letter, Robert S. Gilmer to Chang and Eng Bunker, May 13, 1858. Chang and Eng Bunker Papers # 3761, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In this letter, R.C. Martin writes to Chang and Eng with regret that he had missed visiting them in their home and asking for assistance in obtaining a line of credit with “your friend and Banker Mr. Bunker, requesting him to either give me a letter of credit on some house in Europe or assist me in getting one,” before adding a bit about “Tom Thumb is the Lion of the City at present” and the health of the city.

475 Letter, Robert S. Gilmer to Chang and Eng Bunker, January 16, 1867. Chang and Eng Bunker Papers # 3761, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

the “Siamese Twins.” In adopting a shared surname, the brothers simultaneously stake out claim to their status as their own men and met a precondition of their eventual citizenship.

7.1.3 Chang and Eng Bunker: American Settler Citizens

It is a curious exception that Chang and Eng were successful in their application to obtain citizenship. In the 1790 Naturalization Act (1 Stat. 103), the U.S. congress passed the first uniform rules for naturalization providing that “free white persons” who had lived in the United States for at least two years may be granted citizenship so long as they demonstrate good moral character and swear allegiance to the Constitution.⁴⁷⁶ Chang and Eng were not the first men born in Asia to become citizens of the United States, as at least one Chinese born male had been naturalized prior to the brothers and a small contingent of others became citizens in a period when orientalism in the United States had not reached the fevered pitch that shaped the immigration acts of the later 19th century.⁴⁷⁷ In 1839, Chang’s and Eng’s inclusion into the American citizenry seems not to have been a meaningfully contested matter by those in Wilkes County, likely reflecting less the fantasy of an accepting American republican ideology than the strategically contested and changing boundaries of whiteness that shape American racialized discourse. In Wilkes County, where Chang and Eng appear to have been (or at least are recorded as the only Asian born men in the area in the 1840 census) the racial dynamics of citizenship were not threatened by their inclusion into the citizenry. In both the county and national discourse of the 1840s, the color line of the nation seemed centrally figured between white and black, free man and slave.

476 H. R. 40, Naturalization Bill, March 4, 1790. Records of the U.S. Senate, National Archives and Records Administration. <https://www.visitthecapitol.gov/exhibitions/artifact/h-r-40-naturalization-bill-march-4-1790>

477 Tchen, *New York before Chinatown*, 76, 230. See also Lisa Lowe. *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*. Duke University Press: 1996.

Saturday Morning 12th Oct^r 1839

The Court met pursuant to adjournment

Henry Martin } On Motion of D^oph. Constel
 " } It is ordered by this Court that
 Peter W. Drickle } the said be admitted

Chang & Eng natives of the Kingdom of Siam exhibited
 here in Open Court their petition to take the Oath of the Allegiance to
 the State of North Carolina which was allowed & thereupon the Oath
 of Allegiance was duly administered to them in Open Court

The following is their petition -

State of North Carolina } Exposit of Law
 Wake County } Fall Term 1839

Chang & Eng (Commonly known as the Chinese boys) represent to
 this Honorable Court that they are natives of the Kingdom of Siam in
 Asia, that they arrived in Boston in the State of Massachusetts the 16th on the
 16th day of August 1834 - in October of that year they went to England & re-
 turned to the United States in March 1835 and resided therein without leaving -
 there until the Fall of 1835 when they went to Lower Canada, soon after went
 to the Continent of Europe and were absent about 12 months; after their
 return in 1836 they went to the Province of Lower Canada where they remained
 until October 1836 when they returned to the United States & have continued
 therein without leaving there ever since & since the 1st day of June 1839
 have continued within the State of North Carolina. They further rep-
 resent that during their continuance within the United States they have behaved
 as men of good moral character, that they are attached to the principles
 of the Constitution of the United States and have well disposed to the good
 order and happiness of the same - and they have before this Honorable
 Court declare their intention to become Citizens of the United States and
 to renounce their allegiance to the King of Siam & of every other State they
 know & pretend to - And they respectfully pray that this Hon^o Court
 may receive their declaration, make before this Court with the view of becom-
 ing naturalized Citizens of the United States and that a record thereof
 be made & such order or judgment in the premises as is by Law
 required

Chang & Eng

Subscribed
 Oct 12 1839 [Signature]

Figure 13 Image. "Chang Eng Petition for Citizenship and Oath of Allegiance." October 12, 1839

On Saturday morning, October 12th, 1839, Chang's and Eng's petition for citizenship was published in the Wilkes County Superior Court Minutes for the Fall Term of 1839.⁴⁷⁸ On the stage of the open court in Wilkes County, the brothers again exhibited themselves, for the judgement of others. The published notice begins "Chang [and] Eng ... exhibited here in Open Court their petition to take the Oath of Allegiance to the state of North Carolina," which was "allowed" and "duly administered by local administrator James Gwyn in "open court." Beneath the summary of events, Chang's and Eng's petition was printed for the record. Their petition opens, "Chang Eng (commonly known as The Siamese Twins) represent to this honorable court that they are natives of the Kingdom of Siam in Asia," starting from their native citizenship that had become so enmeshed with their nominalist frame exhibiting around the world. Before making their appeal, the petition takes a modestly exhaustive account of the international travel of the brothers since their arrival in Boston on August 16th, 1829. The petition traces the exhibitioners' travel paths as The Siamese Twins, back and forth from England in 1831, throughout lower Canada in 1833, and the European continent and more in 1836. From all this preface of their movements, which culminated in North Carolina since June 1st, 1839, the brothers make their appeal based on their character and an oath of allegiance to the United States. "They have behaved as men of good moral character, [and] they are attached to the principles of the constitution of the United States and are well disposed to the good order and happiness of the same," the petition goes on. Perhaps Chang and Eng did not need to elaborate the evidence of their good moral character because their ethos had been such a matter of public record and shaping as they exhibited over the last decade and eventually adopted the American style, as I have traced over the previous chapters. Regardless,

478 "Chang Eng Petition for Citizenship and Oath of Allegiance." [NCSA] [Wilkes County Superior Court Minutes Declaration of Intent, Fall term, 1839, 1 p. Photostat (C.R.104.311.3).]

having made their claim to citizenship as grounded in their moral character and the principles of the United States government, the “honorable high court” heard in their favor, as they “declared their intention to become citizens of the United States” and “renounce their allegiance to the King of Siam.” The petition concludes with the signature of Chang Eng and a sealed “order of judgement” conferring American citizenship to the brothers.

Charles Harris, himself an Irish immigrant, also appealed for U.S. citizenship. Harris’ appeal, which appears on the same page and follows immediately after the entry for Chang and Eng, shares many similarities with the brother’s petition. As Orser notes, they each acknowledged their native homeland (“a native of Ireland, within the Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland”), asserted their high moral character and commitment to the principles of the United States constitution, and agreed to renounce their loyalties to any other government as part of their oath of allegiance to the United States (“Victoria, Queen of Great Britain & Ireland”).⁴⁷⁹ While Orser suggests that the brothers’ application “carried more significance than did Harris’s” given that the 1790 Naturalization Act opened a pathway to citizenship for all “free white persons,” I would suggest that Harris’s appeal was also embroiled in the moving boundaries of whiteness that Irish immigrants in the United States were navigating as well.⁴⁸⁰ Whiteness had not always been a space for Irish immigrants to occupy, but in the context of rural Wilkes County, some of the staunch opposition to Irish immigrants that animated anti-immigrant rhetoric and acts in the northeast seemed less apparent.⁴⁸¹ Without suggesting the Irish and Siamese immigrant experiences were the same, as a matter of comparative racialization the naturalization of Harris, Chang, and Eng

479 Orser, *Lives of Chang and Eng*, 81.

480 Orser, *Lives of Chang and Eng*, 82.

481 Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, Routledge: 2009.

each present as cases for the contested boundary work of whiteness that animated American racial imagination in this period.

News of the brothers' citizenship made national headlines. One Philadelphia newspaper reported "The Siamese Twins, Chang and Eng, after purchasing a tract of land in Wilkes county, North Carolina, to settle upon made declaration of their intention to become American citizens," before concluding with the commonplace comic play on the brothers' bodily conjunction and the bonds of the nation, "Ay, they are the boys who will always stick to the *Union*."⁴⁸² This comic distance to engaging in political discourse about national unity appeared as jokes in other instances as well. For example, another writer asked, "Why is it impossible for the Siamese Twins ever to leave this country?," and answered, "because they must forever remain in the *United State*."⁴⁸³ Political discord in the Whig party, centrally around questions of abolition, had become an intensified site of exigency for the metaphorical anxiety around a nation (or people) conjoined and potentially separated.⁴⁸⁴ Asymptotically the rhetorical word play highlights how the brothers' bodily connection was imagined to structurally prevent Chang and Eng from ever fully assuming the agency to leave the union, even as the United States found itself on the brink of several states leaving the Union. What is clear is that the brothers, newly settled into the American south, remained tied to the popular use of the "Siamese Twins" as a metaphorical condensation of struggles over national political unity and division—especially in the context of abolition—continued apace.

482 "Chang and Eng." *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), 11-28-1839. Page [2].

483 [No Headline], *The Daily Picayune*. (New Orleans, Louisiana), 08-07-1840. Page 2.

484 "Trouble In The Wigwam--Whig Tactics--A Rope Of Sand," *Richmond Enquirer* (Richmond, Virginia), 07-05-1839 Page 2; "The Cabinet Discussion," *New-Bedford Mercury*, New Bedford, Massachusetts, 11-26-1840; [No Headline], *The Sun*, (Baltimore, Maryland, 01-11-1842.

Other newspapers traded in comic anxiousness about the trouble conjoined twins pose for a democracy grounded on a singleton individual's right to vote—one vote, one person. One paper asked rhetorically, “Should they get naturalized, how many votes would be they be entitled to at the polls?”⁴⁸⁵ The answer was two and there is a long record of the Chang and Eng both voting to protect their local slave owning interests from the North Carolina gubernatorial election to the United States presidency.⁴⁸⁶ Chang's and Eng's voting appeared as national curiosity in the context of the emergence of presidential “carnival campaign,” where spectacular entertainment and electoral politics converged in public entertainment.⁴⁸⁷ As Chang and Eng took their newly naturalized rights to vote to support an anti-black, pro-slavery American polity, it was their physical connection that continued to complicate their uneasy inclusion into the American political imagination. This bodily rhetoric continued to constrain their inclusion into American life as they were figured as trouble (usually comic) for a republican system of governance that celebrated individual rights to elect their representatives and potentially represent their communities.

It was not only Chang's and Eng's asymptotic inclusion into the American citizenry, as exemplified in the discourse around their exercise of their right to vote, that highlights the complexity of their settlement into an American life in rural North Carolina. The brothers' sexual lives, marriages, and fathering of children also became national headlines that reflect the curious movements of inclusion that never seems to quite reach equality. In the same report offered by the correspondent from the *Tennessee Mirror* on the brothers' settlement in Wilkes County and votes

485 “Siamese Twins,” *New Hampshire Sentinel*, (Keene, New Hampshire), 07-22-1840.

486 “The Siamese Twins,” *Hartford Daily Courant* (Hartford, Connecticut), 11-26-1840, 2; “The Siamese Twins,” *Hudson River Chronicle*, (Ossining, New York), 12-01-1840, 3; [No Headline], *New-Hampshire Sentinel* (Keene, New Hampshire), 12-02-1840; *Hartford Daily Courant* (Hartford, Connecticut), 12-05-1840, Page 2.

487 Ronald Shafer, *Carnival Campaign: How the Rollicking 1840 Campaign of “Tippecanoe and Tyler Too” Changed Presidential Elections Forever*, (Chicago Review Press, 2016).

for the Whig party, the author notes that Chang and Eng seem “fond of rural life,” engaging frequently in shooting their guns, and “industrious” as they can do “almost any kind of work upon their farm.”⁴⁸⁸ It seemed as though Chang and Eng had found on their Wilks County farm their respite from bustle of the city and the wearisome work of traveling and exhibiting themselves for profit. Having settled in and become citizens, the reporter concludes, “it is said that they indulge in serious thoughts of marrying.”⁴⁸⁹ As American men, first in style, then in settlement through land ownership, and again in their naturalization, Chang’s and Eng’s performance of “free white” manhood would be further complicated by their marriages to white sisters in 1843.

7.2 The Bunkers: Husbands, Slave Owners, Fathers

The dynamic surrounding the oscillation between conjoined brothers and individual men that appear in their petition for the Bunker surname and citizenship were also complicating factors in their marriages, ownership of slaves, and roles as fathers. On April 13, 1843, Chang Bunker married Adelaide Yates (born Oct. 11, 1823) and Eng Bunker married Sarah Yates (born Dec. 18, 1822). Adelaide and Sarah were sisters, the daughters of David and Nancy Yates, and had grown up in the Wilkes County area. In a similar situation to their citizenship, wherein the letter of the law seemed to exclude the brothers from American life based on their race and yet their petitions were accepted, and they were apparently included into the American polity, Chang’s and Eng’s marriages to white sisters would seem to have confounded the anti-miscegenation laws which outlawed mixed race marriages at the time. As with the ways in which Chang’s and Eng’s

488 “The Siamese Twins,” *Rhode-Island Republican* (Newport, Rhode Island), December 9, 1840.

489 Ibid.

“Asianness” appeared to be malleable enough to fit the conceptions of whiteness for their appeal for citizenship, their marriages to white women were perhaps similarly conceived, at least within the context of the law in their locale in North Carolina.

Significantly, entangled in Chang’s and Eng’s marriages is their first integration into the southern slaveholding elite. As a wedding gift, their father-in-law David Yates gifted an enslaved woman referred to as “Aunt Grace” to Chang and Eng, the first enslaved person Chang and Eng are recorded as owning.⁴⁹⁰ Over the course of the 1840s, 50s, and 60s, Chang and Eng became further entrenched as slaveholding elite with as many as thirty slaves recorded as part of their households at one time. Attention to roles Chang and Eng performed as slaveholders—an aspect of their life narrative is often excluded or minimized after their deaths—is an importantly confounding bit of history that pushes against grand narratives race and slavery that only appear along a white/black binary.⁴⁹¹ The importance of understanding the place of slavery in the life histories of Chang and Eng Bunker remains one of the most complicating facets of trying to glean the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion along racialized lines in America. Understanding the Bunker families not only in the relationships between the brothers and their wives, and eventually their children, but the enslaved they claimed as part of their households is a vital element of understanding their domestic lives.

Public speculation and curiosity surrounding the sexual lives of Chang and Eng had been a commonplace point of discussion since their earliest exhibitions in the United States in 1829 and England in 1830 and continued throughout their lives (including through today). Despite the most

490 Grace Gates, as she would name herself after emancipation, continued to live in the Eng Bunker household after emancipation and continue to work as a nursemaid as she had done for all the Eng and Sarah Bunker children.

491 In another comparative case, see the history of Cherokee men encouraged to demonstrate their masculinity through ownership of land and slave in the late 18th and early 19th century. Christina Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country: The Changing Face of Captivity in Early America*, (Harvard University Press, 2012); Miles, *Ties That Bind*, 34-36

often comic public response, Chang and Eng had learned the seriousness of the management of the representations of their sexual lives over the course of their exhibitions in the Victorian settings of the 1830s. From that experience, Chang's and Eng's marriages included a carefully curated extension of their inclusion into white heteronormative sociality and yet a space from which they were refigured as curiously deviant. While some papers posed titillating curiosity questions, others made clear a discourse that saw such marriages as unnatural—because of both their conjoined bodies and their mixed races.

It is clear the sensational attention to the domestic lives of the Bunkers has been a prominent site of speculative interest of their biographers at the time and continuing today.⁴⁹² As Chang and Eng and Sarah and Adelaide began to have children the limits of the tolerant inclusion of some began to break. In the final section of this part, I analyze the exigency that pushed Chang and Eng back out on tour, this time with their children. Analyzing the shifts in enfreakment rhetoric from the exhibitions of “Chang and Eng Bunker, the Siamese Twins, with their children” in 1849, 1853, and 1860 offers an opportunity to sense how Chang and Eng sought to make use of their roles as fathers to extend their aggrandizing performances of masculinity. In the archive of how audiences responded to the return of the brothers to the world stage, we can also better understand changing discourses in the 1850s and get glimpse into the impacts of changing conceptions of the Orient, waves of Chinese immigration to the West Coast of the United States, and intense debates around slavery, abolition, and the nation. Within these shifting controversies, Chang's and Eng's exhibitions with their children appeared with mixed success, while the brothers' corporeal

492 Moreheid, J. N., *Lives, Adventures, Anecdotes, Amusements, and Domestic Habits of the Siamese Twins*, (Raleigh, N.C.: E.E. Barclay, 1850), North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Shepard M. Duggar, *Romance of the Siamese Twins*, (Edwards Printing: Burnsville, N.C., 1936); Darin Strauss, *Chang and Eng: A Novel*, (Penguin Publishing, 2001).

configuration and racial status became an intensified site for working through controversies surrounding the meanings of the nation. Over the course of the 1850s exhibitions of the Siamese Twins with their children the asymptotic inclusion of the brothers into an aggrandizing masculinity conveyed by their reproduction of recognizable domestic scenes became increasingly complicated by anti-Chinese rhetoric that associated the brothers with their “Asianness” in ways that precluded their recognition as tolerably white. As Chang and Eng were returning from their 1860 exhibitions in San Francisco, California to their homes, families, and slaves in North Carolina the United States Civil War appeared imminent and these shifting racialized discourses became even more stark.

7.2.1 The Bunkers’ Marriages and Life as Husbands

Joseph Orser’s meticulous charting of the legal regulation of illicit sexual activity in Wilkes County, North Carolina offers an essential backdrop to grasp the complexity of Chang’s and Eng’s marriages by highlighting the cultural, social, and legal investment in regulating sexual relationships at both the county and state level. The Yates’s were a respected family, but perhaps not one of Wilkes County’s “elite.”⁴⁹³ Adelaide and Sarah’s father had accumulated some 500 acres of land where they farmed and by 1840 counted among their household seven enslaved individuals. However, by contrast with the ways in which some of the Wilkes County elite seemed immune from the legal forces of the area, the public indictment and fine of Sarah Yates (not the Sarah that would marry Eng), for “unlawfully” living and cohabitating with a man (Aron Church) while “not being man and wife” suggests the Yateses were clearly subjected to the sexual and

493 Orser, *Lives of Chang and Eng*, 88.

juridical constraints in North Carolina.⁴⁹⁴ Orser suggests that the labor of Chang and Eng to legitimize their marriage—with Baptist officiant, paying the legal bonds, and even publishing the marriage documents for the public—were similarly acts that exceeded many marriages who had ignored the letter of the law.⁴⁹⁵ As was the case with Charles Harris’ marriage only a few years earlier, the Bunker and Yates weddings were backed by the usual \$1,000 bonds taken out by Chang and Eng and Jesse Yates and a marriage license was signed and submitted by county clerk William Masten.⁴⁹⁶ I would add that their labor may have been a particular cost of inclusion that the conjoined brothers incurred for their right to marry on both racialized and ableist grounds.

Even before their marriages there were expressions of discomfort and anxiety about the conjoined brothers’ sexuality and the possibility of their intimacy with women. Most often framed in comic contexts—as if the sexual attraction of a woman to conjoined twins is too incongruous with normative sexual desires to be treated seriously—discussions of the brothers “love intrigue” often peppered the public discourse surrounding their public exhibitions.⁴⁹⁷ While most of the public discourse centered Chang’s and Eng’s physical connection as the incongruous element in their sexual lives, others also raised the question of race in their sexual relationships. In one instance, the brothers were imagined having developed a sexual relationship with Afong Moy, who had been exhibited as the “Chinese Woman” around the same time that Chang and Eng rose to popularity, while most others seemed to swirl around white anxieties that the brothers may attract

494 Orser, *Lives of Chang and Eng*, 88-89.

495 Orser, *Lives of Chang and Eng*, 97.

496 Wilkes County Marriage Bonds, NCSA. The physical marriage license and certificates is potentially held in Orser’s private collection. I have relied on his account as well as a newspaper clipping from an undated article printed (likely published in the early 1940s) which described the “faded, yellow papers” being found by “NYA and WPA workers” who “came across the original marriage bonds issued when the original Siamese Twins, Chang and Eng married the Yates sisters.” (Marriage documents, April 13, 1843, folder 9, Chang and Eng Bunker Papers 3761, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.)

a white woman's attention.⁴⁹⁸ Even as Chang and Eng settled in North Carolina, the public rumors of their sexual lives continued to land in the papers. For example, a series of articles spreading and refuting the notion that Ann Royal was preparing to marry the Siamese Twins appeared shortly after the brothers were becoming citizens.⁴⁹⁹ What is clear from this record is that the sexual lives of conjoined twins were not merely private matters, but topics of immense interest for curious publics around the country.

While most of these public commentaries were couched in terms of comic distance, the sexual lives of the brothers were a more serious concern for those involved in managing the Siamese Twins exhibitions. Abel Coffin, for example, writing to his wife from the Atlantic Ocean as the brothers' relationship to Susan was unravelling at home, conveys his own interest in Chang's and Eng's sexual lives. "I want to see Eng Chang," he writes, "much I expect they are almost white with so many ladies raising them."⁵⁰⁰ While Abel Coffin's language is curious in that he seems to indicate the brothers' whitening from their close relationships with the ladies raising them, he also seems to be suggesting that he is aware of the public reports of the women who have expressed interest in the two. He goes on, stating bluntly, "I hope they are not married."⁵⁰¹

It is not clear why Abel Coffin had reason to believe that the brothers were entertaining marriage. Perhaps it was from the frequent public speculation or perhaps it was from rumors he had heard about Chang and Eng "indulging in all sorts of dissipation—whoring, gaming, and

498 *New York Mirror and Boston Post*, June 8, 1838. See also Tchen, *New York before Chinatown*, 101-6 for more on Afong Moy see *Liverpool Mercury*, January 22, 1830; *New York Spectator*, November 28, 1833; *Virginia Free Press*, December 5, 1833. See also Gary Okihiro, *Common Ground: Reimagining American History*, (Princeton University Press, 2001) for a discussion of attraction and repulsion regarding Chang and Eng.

499 "Unsubstantiated Rumors," *The Daily Picayune*, (New Orleans, Louisiana), November 1, 1840; [No Headline], *The Daily Picayune*, (New Orleans, Louisiana), December 6, 1840.

500 Letter Abel Coffin to Susan Coffin, September 2, 1831. [NCSA] Siamese Twins Collection, P.C. 916.1. Correspondence, Capt. Abel Coffin, 1831-1833, 1929, n.d. Photocopies.

501 Ibid.

drinking” under Hale’s management.⁵⁰² In one anecdote, Hale suggests that Abel Coffin had urged the brothers to avoid the “impropriety of their having connexion [sic] with women” and when Chang and Eng claimed they had “as good right to a woman as he had,” Abel Coffin gave Chang and Eng the “damn’dest thrashing they ever had in their lives,” which he framed as “for their good.”⁵⁰³ It seems the seriousness of the perceived sexual impropriety of Chang’s and Eng’s relationship to the women who were in their audience was not lost on the brothers either. In the context of Victorian sexual mores that they were exhibiting, Hale writes that “Chang Eng had often said they did not wish [Susan Coffin] or any other woman to be with them” because of the “idle tales” it seemed to inspire.⁵⁰⁴

While the public circulated curiosity stories about Chang’s and Eng’s sexual lives, they, and the Coffins, seemed interested in managing that anxiety as a gesture toward the moral character of the brothers and their exhibitions. While Abel Coffin does not expound upon the reasoning for his hope that Chang and Eng had not married, given the context of the relationship it is likely that he viewed their marriage as a cost to his own profits being extracted from their exhibitions. Not married, Chang and Eng could continue to excite public interest what their sexual lives might become, whereas within the discourse of marriage their sexual relationships would be channeled in a more dulled heteronormative narrative. Moreover, if the brothers had married the tenuous

502 Letter James Hale to Charles Harris with Siamese Twins, November 4, 1832. P.3. [NCSA] Thurmond Chatham Papers Historical and Family Papers, 1776-1955. Letters to and Notes of Siamese Twins and Dr. Charles Harris 1831-1844.

503 Ibid. This anecdote is relayed by Hale to Harris as a rumor that he had heard while in Boston in a time when he was clearly angling to stifle discord about Chang and Eng and the Coffin’s. Given the record of Abel Coffin’s feelings on the brothers’ marriage and approach to parenting it is not without possibility that Abel Coffin admonished the brothers for being with women, enforcing such a message with physical violence. Regardless of the veracity of the events it seems important that such sexual discretion was an important frame for the relationship between the Coffins and Chang and Eng as part of the lessons of whitening.

504 Letter James Hale to Captain William Davis, September 7, 1831. [NCSA] Siamese Twins Collection, P.C. 916.1. Correspondence, Capt. Abel Coffin, 1831-1833, 1929, n.d. Photocopies.

claim the Coffins asserted as the proper parents and guardians may appear to have less hold. Regardless, Abel Coffin's hopes were reality until well after Chang and Eng separated from the Coffin's and went out on their own.



Figure 14 Image: "Adelaide Bunker and Sarah Bunker" CK413.5, in the North Carolina Collection

Photographic Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Chang's and Eng's marriages to the Yates sisters in 1843 attracted a renewed intensity of national attention to their lives as Chang's and Eng's marriage took on an "unusual currency" in

national papers.⁵⁰⁵ Rhetorically the announcements of Chang's and Eng's marriages are an interesting archive of the various racial and sexual anxieties. *The Weekly Ohio State Journal* even drew from it as a "Question for Debating Societies" posing the question: "Ought not the wives of the Siamese twins to be indicted for marrying a quadruped?"⁵⁰⁶ Newspapers across the Northeastern United States sought to relay the news to their readers, offering details of the ceremony and posing curiosity questions about the particulars of their arrangements. Some newspapers decried the whole story as a hoax, and chastised other papers for being "too incautious in giving currency to imp roble stories" that they would have otherwise "paid no attention to it, thinking it altogether unworthy of credit."⁵⁰⁷ In the effort to turn public attention away from the topic of conversation deemed unworthy, the papers ironically amplified public attention to that very subject. Other papers sought to correct the record again, and confirm the veracity of the marriage, citing a "letter from the gentleman under whose care the Siamese Twins have been living, fully confirming the report of their marriage."⁵⁰⁸ It was clear that the Chang Bunker and Adelaide Yates and Eng Bunker and Sarah Yates was still popular currency in the Northern United States where newspapers enfreaked the event through their repeated reference to "The Siamese Twins."

In the rhetorical doubling of these papers is an expression of discomfort and curiosity with the complexity of conjoined twins' sexual lives expressed in comic distance. A newspaper in Philadelphia, for example, punned that "The Siamese twins, who have been residing for some years past in North Carolina, where they purchased a plantation with the avails of their exhibition

505 "More Mistatements," *The North American And Daily Advertiser*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), May 30, 1843.

506 "Question for Debating Societies," *The Weekly Ohio State Journal*, (Columbus, Ohio), May 24, 1843.

507 "More Mistatements," *The North American And Daily Advertiser*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), May 30, 1843.

508 "A Hoak," *The Southern Patriot*, (Charleston, South Carolina), June 6, 1843.

through the Union, have entered into a state of *double* blessedness.”⁵⁰⁹ *The New York Courier*, relays the news under the title, “Marriage Extraordinary,” and puns the double noting that “they had entered into a state of *double* blessedness” and concluding that they remained uninformed of “whether the happy *quadruple* started on a journey to pass off the honey moon, or remained at home.” Reporting the details of the marriage was an interest affixed to Chang and Eng whose position in public life would continue to attract attention and thus had to make additional gestures to be treated credibly. Even so, the Massachusetts newspaper makes clear that the story would never be complete. The expressed concern and curiosity in “how far the partnership in wives goes” makes clear some discomfort with the more than monogamous marriage often imagined in the sexual lives of conjoined twins. Allison Pingree has named the queer trouble conjoined twins’ sexual lives appear as incredibly well: “their marriages raised the specters of incest, homoeroticism, adultery, and exotic orgies of flesh that profoundly confronted the heterosexual marital norms of Victorian America.”⁵¹⁰

Other newspapers published a wave of viscerally negative responses to the marriages that made such trouble clear, questioning the moral character of those involved ranging from the Baptist priest to the wives and their father, and to the communities that would allow such an indecency to occur. Unlike in the New York papers whose readers seems certainly aware of the Siamese Twins from their earlier performances, *The Daily Picayune* marriage announcement qualifies their readers awareness, suggesting they “possibly” or “may recollect” Chang and Eng,

510 Allison Pingree, “America’s ‘United Siamese Brothers’: Chang and Eng and Nineteenth-Century Ideologies of Democracy and Domesticity,” in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed., *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996): 95.

who they describe as “fellows travelling about the country, united by some unnatural tie.”⁵¹¹ Notably the author “never took care to inform” themselves of “The Siamese Twins” when they had previously exhibited, perhaps because of their discomfort with the conjoined bodies of Chang and Eng which are described as unnatural. The “unnatural tie” doubles to signify both Chang’s and Eng’s corporeal connection and their marriages, as the author joins the chorus in “denouncing the wretch who could have united the parties with every religious sanction.” As another example of the religious and naturalist expression of disgust with the marriage, The *N.Y. Express* also reportedly “wonders that a Baptist Church Elder could have been found to aid in perpetrating this enormity.”⁵¹² The *Boston Bee* summed up this discourse in a series of rhetorical questions around the moral character of those involved, asking: “What sort of women can they be who have entered into such a marriage? What sort of father to consent? What sort of clergyman he who performed the unnatural ceremony?” And concluding, “We should call them the meanest sort.”⁵¹³ Certainly the Victorian and religious fervor and backlash to Chang’s and Eng’s weddings can be registered in the close reading of the newspapers of the period and the currency that their weddings had in conveying public opinion.

However, it was not only Victorian sexual norms that were at stake always. In some instances, their marriages were refracted back through sectarian debates over abolition in America. Recall the newspaper in Philadelphia who punned that The Siamese twins had “entered into a state of *double* blessedness,” described Chang and Eng as having “been residing for some years past in

511 “The Siamese Twins,” *The Daily Picayune*, (New Orleans, Louisiana), May 5, 1843. *The New York Courier* framed Chang and Eng as still celebrities who had not been “heard from ... for a long time,” suggesting “few of our readers in this city or in any of the principal towns in the country, who have not seen the famous united brothers, the Siamese twins.”

512 “Marriage Extraordinary,” *The Constitution*, (Middletown, Connecticut), May 3, 1843. f

513 “Marriage of the Siamese Twins,” *The Daily Picayune*, (New Orleans, Louisiana), May 9, 1843.

North Carolina, where they purchased a plantation with the avails of their exhibition through the Union.”⁵¹⁴ The announcement shifts the language of “farm” or “land” to plantation and its associations with slavery, and given that Chang and Eng did, in fact, own several enslaved men, women, and children, the rhetorical frame amplifies an abolitionist tenor. The Philadelphia writer suggests the brother’s livelihood was derived from the profits of their exhibitions in the Northern cities. Notably, the author does not recognize the brothers by their names, Chang Bunker and Eng Bunker, but instead they are referred to only as “The Siamese Twins.” Nor does the author consider the racialized violence in Northern states, where Chang and Eng had experienced violent disregard by the Coffins of Newburyport and had been assaulted by white mobs only ten years earlier. What is clear is that the discord animated from Chang’s and Eng’s marriages were both Victorian sexual norms and American racial anxieties that would become more acute as the abolitionist movement and Civil War radically reframed the “honor” of white slaveholding that Chang and Eng seemed to marshal to support their public appearance as respectable men.

From all this discord it seems curious then that there has been a revisionary history of imagined racialized violence in Wilkes County against the Bunker families immediately following their marriages. Orser traces the introduction of conflict to Kay Hunter’s 1964 popular biography, *The Duet*. According to Kay Hunter, who claimed to be speaking from “correspondence with one of their descendants who is an expert on their life story” (possibly Joffrey Bunker whose collections of family history serve as the foundation for much of the collection at the University of North Carolina), writes that many of the “townspeople were both shocked and disgusted” that “Chang and Eng should attempt such familiarity with two perfectly normal girls.”⁵¹⁵ In addition to

514 “The Siamese Twins Married,” *Public Ledger*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), April 27, 1843.

515 Kay Hunter, *Duet for a Lifetime*, 81-87.

“verbal attacks,” Hunter writes, “a few men took matters further” and “smashed some windows at [Mr. Yates] farm house, and generally made life very uncomfortable for the family” up to the point of threatening to burn his crops.⁵¹⁶ Hunter suggests Chang’s and Eng’s interest in marriage was the “limit” point of the community’s tolerance that reinforced their status as “freaks of nature.”⁵¹⁷

From Hunter’s invention, which itself may mirror the 1960s public discourse about white mobs racialized violence that set the context for her biography as much as those in the 19th century, later narratives have intensified the violence. Irving Wallace and Amy Wallace “escalated the rhetoric” as the few men became “several groups” and the marriage decried by locals as an “unholy alliance.”⁵¹⁸ Academic scholars have also relied on the violence at the scene of the marriage to illustrate white orientalist violence and voyeurism around the sexual lives of conjoined twins.⁵¹⁹ Orser suggests, however, that a commonplace error in these analyses is that they do not pay attention to the historical record of writing about the marriage, including newspapers and letters from the broader community, which do not record any case of violence. While Orser is quick to admit that the absence of the violence does not preclude the possibility of such violence, especially given the legacy of white mob violence used to reinforce sexual and racial norms, he rightfully raises concerns that such ahistorical analysis may elide the ways in which violence was operating (and not) across certain communities. The archive around the various inclusions and exclusions of Chang and Eng resonate not as much in spectacular Southern mob violence, but in the archive of Northern collective disgust and curiosity surrounding the brothers’ marriages.

516 Hunter, *Duet*, 83. I am thankful for Paul Johnson’s note here: “For people looking back from the 20th century, it is possible that it would be more tolerable to imagine that Chang and Eng were subjected to “primitive” racism rather than imagining that complicated republican practices of citizenship and race making were then operative and efficient (as they still were a hundred years later).”

517 Hunter, *Duet*, 84.

518 Wallace and Wallace, *The Two*, 173.

519 Gary Y. Okihiro, *Common Ground*; Allison Pingree, “America’s United Siamese Brothers”; David L. Clark and Catherine Myser, “Being Humaned”

7.2.2 The Bunkers: Integrating into the Southern Slaveholding Elite



Figure 15 Image: [Grace Gates] "Former slave of Eng Bunker" photograph in the Chang and Eng Bunker Papers #3761, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Chang's and Eng's marriage to the Yates sisters was also conjoined to their inclusion into the American south slave owning elite. In the context of Wilkes County, North Carolina where the majority of farmers did not own slaves and only 12 percent of the population was enslaved men,

women, and children, Chang and Eng had become part of an elite set of farmers in the area.⁵²⁰ It is difficult to precisely account for Chang's and Eng's experience as slaveholders, although census and slave schedules along with letters offer some material from which we can ground archival claims. In the years after David Yates gifted Grace to the Bunkers, Chang and Eng purchased several slaves and by 1853 the brothers claimed to own more than 30 slaves.⁵²¹ Two years later, however, the brothers ended their "copartnership" and Eng paid \$1 to Chang for the ownership of most of the slaves they had jointly owned.⁵²² In exchange, Eng would receive the deed to more of the land the brothers owned.⁵²³ By the time the Civil War broke out Chang's wealth inflated as the price of enslaved people rose rapidly over the course of the war only to be eliminated in emancipation. While the individuals the Bunkers had owned took various paths after emancipation, with some leaving to settle their own homes and others staying in the homes they knew, it is clear that the brothers had staked a significant portion of their economic and social livelihood on owning enslaved black women, men, boys and girls from 1843 through 1865.⁵²⁴ Chang and Eng had already learned the lessons of slavery and the advantaged to be gained from owning slaves from their previous struggles to disassociate from that position. Chang and Eng must have understood that their ability to own slaves established their mastery over black people and their superiority to poorer white people all while integrating themselves among those elite in North Carolina who could say that they similarly owned slaves.

520 Orser, *Lives of Chang and Eng*, 124-129.

521 Bill of Sale for two slaves sold to Chang and Eng Bunker, Chang and Eng Bunker Papers #3761, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Chang & Eng Bunkers from T.F. Prather and Chang & Eng Bunkers from William Marsh, Surry County Record of Deed, 1839-1847, vol 4, pp. 304-5, 530, NCSA.; *Raleigh Register and North-Carlina Gazette*, May 24, 1848; Chang and Eng Bunker in the 1850 Federal U.S. Census Slave Schedule, Stewart's Creek District, Surry County, NC

522 Bill of sale for slaves, 20 November 1855, Chang and Eng Bunker Papers #3761, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

523 Orser, *Lives of Chang and Eng*, 123.

524 Orser, *Lives of Chang and Eng*, 154.

How the Bunkers made use of the enslaved in their households is even more unclear. While some newspapers wrote of Chang and Eng as physically and verbally abusive, the brothers actively sought to construct an image of themselves as more benevolent. In the Siamese Twins exhibition literature referring to their roles as slave owners, Chang and Eng are framed as generous providers, including educating their slaves to read and write, which was against the law in some southern states. Moreover, the brothers continued to present themselves as able-bodied, hard-working men who toiled in the soil alongside their slaves in the farm. Some letters between Chang and Eng and their families and friends describe commands that were to be relayed to the slaves by their wives to manage the farms while they were touring in 1848, 1853, and 1860. Regardless of the veneer of benevolence, Chang's and Eng's rapidly expanding ownership of black individuals marks their investment in the economic, political, and social violence of slavery. As curious as these examples of Chang's and Eng's slaves laboring in the fields is the relatively young age of the vast majority of the enslaved they counted among their household. How was it that Chang and Eng were profiting from all the young slaves they owned is not precisely logged in the historical register.

What does seem clear is that anti-black slavery had become an important element of the decade long efforts by the brothers to craft a public image that enabled their inclusion into American life by performing respectable ideals of masculinity, race, and class by the standards of their times. Adopting the role of slave owner reinforced their claims to whiteness, an extension of their recognition as citizens and married men. Across these techniques of inclusion into American life, Chang's and Eng's life story calls into question the overdetermined imagination of slavery as a white/black phenomenon. Even so, Chang's and Eng's inclusions into a normative American life seemed always just out of reach as others continued to acknowledge their good moral character and normalness "except for" that one thing—sometimes their corporeal connection to each other

and sometimes their racialized connection to Siam. As the symbolic significance of slaveholding to whiteness shifted in the United States depending on geography and time, the ways in which Chang and Eng were increasingly unable to assume a white position seem to refract the rising anti-Chinese sentiment amplified in the 1850s and again after the Civil War. As Chang and Eng lost the association of whiteness that was grounded in their ownership of black people, they were simultaneously being cast out as racially other Chinese. It is in this movement of the boundaries of whiteness in America that the most significant lessons about the complexity of comparative racialization appear in the lives of Chang and Eng Bunker.

7.3 The Bunkers as Fathers and Exhibitions of “Siamese Twins with Children”

The “outbursts” that manifested the “greatest indignation” at their marriage were poised to return after an announcement that the first of their 21 children had been born.⁵²⁵ For at least one author who believed that Chang’s and Eng’s marriage announcement fervor was a hoax and immoral distraction, it was the birth of their children that convinced them otherwise. In 1844, a correspondent of the *S.C. Spartan* gave the following account of Chang and Eng and their families.

You may be aware that some few years since, the Siamese Twins, Chang and Eng, retired from the public gaze, and settled down in this county (Wilkes) as farmers. You will also recollect, that during last year it was published in some of the newspapers that they had married two sisters. This notice was treated as a hoax by some of the journals, and I incline to think that public opinion settled that the twins were still living in single blessedness. To my surprise I find that the supposed hoax is a literal fact; and that these distinguished characters are married men!—Mrs. C. and Mrs. E. are well known to several of my personal acquaintances, and are said to be very amiable and industrious. Each of the ladies has presented her particular “lord” with an heir, in the person of a fine, fat, bouncing daughter!”⁵²⁶

525 “Singular Enough,” *The Daily Picayune*, (New Orleans, Louisiana), May 17, 1844.

526 “Siamese Twins,” *The North American And Daily Advertiser*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), November 7, 1844.

The author is convinced only after “several ... personal acquaintances” of Adelaide and Sarah shared their stories. Notably, they were acquainted with “Mrs. C” and “Mrs. E.,” short for Mrs. Chang (Adelaide Bunker) and Mrs. Eng (Sarah Bunker), who were often present to greet visitors into their homes. The children (Katherine Marcellus Bunker born to Sarah and Eng Bunker on February 10, 1844, and Josephine Virginia Bunker born to Adelaide and Chang Bunker six days later February 16, 1844) were healthy and lively. More children followed, as did plans to build a second homes on land east of their home in nearby Mt. Airy, North Carolina.

In 1845, Chang and Eng would begin their move to Surry County. In March, they bought 650 acres of land and a small home about five miles south of Mount Airy for \$3,750 and began to take up part time residency by 1847. The two-home arrangement, wherein Adelaide Bunker would remain in Traphill, and Sarah Bunker would move to Mount Airy was a necessity. While the Traphill plantation, as it had come to be called, seemed to produce a steady product the distance to the nearest market for transportation made turning profits a challenge. Surrey County, while still a rural community, offered the brothers access to not only a market to sell their goods but also a growing manufacturing enterprise. Orser suggests “Chang and Eng split time between the two properties, with one wife at each, for a simple reason: Their families were growing rapidly.”⁵²⁷ By June 1847, Adelaide had given birth to four children, and Sarah had delivered three, and the combined population of enslaved black individuals on their household approached twenty. For the next several years, at least through 1853, Chang and Eng commuted between their home in Mt. Airy and their home in Wilkes County. The growing domestic homes the twins pushed the brothers to return to exhibition tours, this time with their children in tow and their productions materials adjusted to match. Tours of the “Siamese Twins with their Children” in 1849, 1853, and 1860

⁵²⁷ Orser, *Lives of Chang and Eng*, 109.

reflect not only changes in the lives of Chang and Eng and their families, but the changing contexts of their exhibitions as the United States was experiencing political and social upheaval around questions of nation, race, and disability approaching the Civil War.

Grounded in the principle of manifest destiny the westward expansion of the United States emerged in racialized and gendered contexts.⁵²⁸ In 1848, the United States government and government of Mexico signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo bringing the two year US-Mexican War to an end as the United States appropriated over 500,000 acres of lands that are now California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico from Mexico. While the treaty included provisions protecting the property and civil rights of Mexican nationals within the new borders, most former Mexican citizens faced subordinated social and economic position as Anglo-Americans came to dominate local economies and political influence.⁵²⁹ Race fundamentally shaped the construct as African Americans were still considered property and Native American and Mexican Americans were dispossessed of their property.⁵³⁰ In the wake of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the Compromise of 1850, California entered the Union as a free state but the United States settler colonial expansion westward was entangled with the trafficking of slaves westward alongside the rise of the California gold rush.⁵³¹ Around the same time an influx of Chinese laborers arrived in California and a changing discourse of emergent

528 Lisa Lowe, "The Gender of Sovereignty," S&F Online, 6(3), 2008.

http://sfonline.barnard.edu/immigration/print_lowe.htm

529 Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Anglo-saxonism*, (Cambridge: Harvard, 1981).

530 G. Luna, "On the complexities of race: the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and Dred Scott v. Sandford," *University of Miami Law Review*, 53, 1999: 691-716; Karen Roybal, *Archives of Dispossession: Recovering the Testimonios of Mexican American Herederos, 1848-1960*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

531 Stacey L. Smith, "Remaking Slavery in a Free State: Masters and Slaves in Gold Rush California," *Pacific Historical Review*, 80(1), 2011: 28-63.

anti-Chinese racism.⁵³² While the United States westward expansion continued through violent dispossession, Chang and Eng began to prepare their return to exhibited themselves alongside their children in 1849 and 1853 throughout Northern and Southern American cities. It would not be until 1860 that the brothers would make it to California for their first exhibitions at the brink of the U.S. Civil War.

The costs of keeping their growing family becomes part of the promotion of their exhibitions as the Chang and Eng Bunker, the Siamese Twins and Children starting in 1849 and recurring off and on for the next 25 years until their death in 1874. In a bit of early speculative promotional advertising, the paper concludes, “that Chang and Eng, with their wives and children, contemplate making a tour through this country in a year or two,” an attraction they claimed would “doubtless prove more interesting and attractive in their second tour than they did in their first over the civilized world.”⁵³³ The brothers were promoted in terms of a lively conversation that would be more appealing in their second tour of the “civilized world.” Importantly, the rhetoric of health and happiness returns across their exhibitions as an important consideration not only for the brothers but their children as well. Now rationalized by the exigence of their growing American families, Chang and Eng promised to deliver a lively discussion informed by their life experiences. The exhibitions of the “Siamese Twins with their Children” were performative civilizing narratives. The brothers’ appearance on the stage with their children dressed as gentlemen suggested the civilizing benefits of integration into American social life. Simultaneously, the brothers’ conversations reflected their travels of the world and offered them an opportunity to

532 Viet Thanh Nguyen, “California, The Pacific Rim, and the Asian American Imagination: Past, Present, and Future,” *Western American Literature* 59-165; Leti Volpp, “‘Obnoxious To Their Very Nature’: Asian Americans and Constitutional Citizenship,” *Asian Law Journal*, 8(71), 71-87.

533 Ibid.

extend that civilizing narrative to their audiences by explaining how they had gone from conjoined boys born in Siam into respected men in America.

7.3.1 1849

Chang and Eng decided to return to exhibiting on the world's stage at the age of 38. Five years after they had first started hinting that they would plan a second world tour, an agreement with New York promoter, Edmund H. Doty, was drafted in 1849.⁵³⁴ Touring meant Chang and Eng would have to leave their homes, wives, and children—including all the labor of managing the household of enslaved individuals and the farm—as they returned to the demanding travel of the exhibition tour. Enfreaking their performance as “the greatest curiosity in the world,” Chang, Eng, Catherine, and Josephine took to touring as “The Living Siamese Twins, Chang, Eng, and Their Children.” In April and May, Chang and Eng and their Children made their way through Richmond,⁵³⁵ Washington,⁵³⁶ Philadelphia,⁵³⁷ and New York⁵³⁸ where Chang and Eng were framed as devote husbands and fathers, naturalized citizens, staunch Whig supporters, and hardworking farmers despite their fame and financial success. Josephine and Katherine receive

534 Contract between Edmund H. Doty and Chang and Eng Bunker, 1849. Chang and Eng Bunker Papers #3761, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. According to an incomplete draft, Chang, Eng, and their two oldest daughters (Katherine Bunker and Josephine Bunker, each aged 5) agreed to “engage themselves” for the “purpose of being by [Doty] publicly exhibited to the public” for an 8 month period for a sum total of \$8,000. Starting April 25th, 1849, the Bunker family would be exhibited according to a schedule drafted by Edmund Doty, but not for longer than “six hours each day.” Chang and Eng had learned the lessons of exploitation of their time and labor in the vague language of servitude that framed their contract with Abel Coffin twenty years earlier and marshalled their status to demand protections for their work.

535 [No Headline], *Richmond Enquirer*, (Richmond, Virginia), May 4, 1849. Headline- Local Items; Article Type- News/Opinion Philadelphia Inquirer (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) • 05-05-1849 • Page 1 .pdf

536 “The Siamese Twins,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), May 16, 1849; [No Headline], *Philadelphia Inquirer*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), May 8, 1849.

537 “Siamese Twins,” *The Sun*, (Baltimore, Maryland), May 12, 1849.

538 [No Headline], *State Gazette*, (Trenton, New Jersey), May 24, 1849. f

scant mention, with one noting that the two cousins themselves look like twins and another opining that they appear “healthy and intelligent.”⁵³⁹ Most frequently the children were markers of the brothers’ masculinity, evidence of their capacity to procreate and provide for a family—especially such a well-dressed, educated, and lively bunch—became an important signifier of their masculine ascension into the Southern gentry, and its attendant racial and classed significance.

This first foray into exhibiting as The Siamese Twins with their Children (1849) seemed to cobble together a flailing array of enfreaked frames to appeal to audiences that appear to have had at best modest success. By August, the tour seemed to be a “bust,” which Orser attributes “primarily to incompetent management.”⁵⁴⁰ It is not clear what happened between June and July, but by August The Siamese Twins and their children stopped off in Baltimore and began to announce that their tour of the rest of the country and Europe would be postponed “until the cholera has passed away.”⁵⁴¹ In the face of another outbreak of cholera, the same disease that had traveled shared colonial pathways of the brothers since their arrival in the United States, Chang and Eng, along with their two daughters, set back to North Carolina. It would be another 4 years before “The Siamese Twins with their Children” would attempt another exhibition tour.

7.3.2 1853

By 1853, Chang and Eng had a total of eleven children and began the preparation for another world tour. Again, they planned to take two of their children, this time Katherine and Christopher, as part of the attraction and explicitly adopted a rhetoric of paternal care as their

539 “The Siamese Twins,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), May 16, 1849; “Siamese Twins,” *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette*, (Concord, New Hampshire), May 17, 1849.

540 Orser, *Lives of Chang and Eng*, 118.

541 [No Headline], *Rusk Pioneer*, (Rusk, Texas), August 1, 1849.

exhibitions were framed as a necessary venture to support their growing families. The Bunker family put on an aggrandizing display, as their refined manners, book learning, and skill in public conversation all lent themselves to the projection of a distinguished American family. Of course, this construction of the aggrandized American Bunker family could only ever approach the normative familial appeal, always constrained by the “except for the fact that no family of distinction would exhibit itself to the public.”⁵⁴² Moreover, the settled Southern Bunkers were heading back out on tour in a very distinct cultural environment than what they had experienced exhibiting in the 1830s. While Chang and Eng had become American citizens, settlers, farmers, husbands, fathers, and slave owners in the “backwoods” of North Carolina, by the 1850s changes both abroad and in the United States conjured new associations between the brothers and the imagination of the Orient.

A new set of show materials were produced for the 1853 tour, including a new show biography and images of the Bunker families that sought to frame the Siamese Twins with their Children as an exhibition of an aggrandized Southern family. In 1853, Thomas W. Strong published *An Account of Chang and Eng, the World Renowned Siamese Twins* to be sold alongside their exhibitions. The “elegantly illustrated” volume is considerably longer than the efforts of James Hale in the 1830s, with nearly two thirds of the pamphlet’s 91 pages focused on expounding upon Chang’s and Eng’s early lives in Siam in a sensationalist rhetoric. The length of the book, including the production of several new images, reflects not only the vast sums of experiences the brothers had accumulated but the changing print capacities in the time.⁵⁴³ In a persuasive close reading of the new biography, Joseph Orser describes the booklet as a mashup of Hale’s work and

⁵⁴² Orser, *Lives of Chang and Eng*, 118.

⁵⁴³ See Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show*, 1988.

a “retelling” of John Crawford’s journal of his embassy to Siam and Cochin China in 1822.⁵⁴⁴ Importantly, in this retelling Chang and Eng were substituted as the agents of Crawford’s movements and framed as the civilized lookers marking Siamese superstition and ignorance from their recognizable position as Americans. The pamphlet, amplified by the recognizable images of the brothers with their children, offered a romantic view of Asian immigration as Chang and Eng came to stand in for the potential for foreigners to become successful men in America through hard work. Strong’s *Account* was read widely and reprinted in part in newspapers and magazines across the United States and in Europe. His narrative retelling became a frame for curious American audiences, attempting to capitalize off a rush of news about the Orient tied to changing leadership and economic exchange in Siam, the Taiping rebellion in China, and wave of Chinese immigrants to California during the gold rush and national railroad construction. Orser, Tchen, and Wu have all noted the various strands of Orientalism that came together in Strong’s *Account*.⁵⁴⁵

The itinerary of the 1853-54 Siamese Twins tour started in April with their first stop commencing in Boston and concluded a year later in Wheeling, West Virginia while covering three pages with a list of double columned urban sites along the way.⁵⁴⁶ News of the tour began to circulate widely, with speculative reports about being paid \$5,000 by a northern speculator (sometimes assumed to be P.T. Barnum) and racist remembrances of earlier visits to the brothers being printed in newspapers across the Northeast.⁵⁴⁷ In March 1854, the Siamese Twins with their

544 Orser, *Lives of Chang and Eng*, 118. For the full reading see Orser, *Lives of Chang and Eng*, 118-124. For a close reading of Crawford’s account situated in its original contexts see chapter 1 of this dissertation. For a brief discussion of the process of producing the pamphlet in a series of privately held letters between Chang and Eng, Seth B. Howes, Avery Smith, and T.W. Strong see Orser, *Lives of Chang and Eng*, 118-119.

545 Orser, *Lives of Chang and Eng*, 122-123; Tchen, *New York*; Wu, *Reconnected*.

546 Itinerary, 1853-1854. Chang and Eng Bunker Papers #3761, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

547 [No Headline], *The Sun*, (Baltimore, Maryland), March 24, 1853; “Fire and Loss of Life,” *The Farmers’ Cabinet*, (Amherst, New Hampshire), March 31, 1853. [No Headline], *New Hampshire Patriot and State Gazette*, (Concord, New Hampshire), April 6, 1853.” The [Illegible] Twins,” *The Boston Daily Atlas*, (Boston, Massachusetts), March

children exhibited in Philadelphia at “Col. Wood’s” alongside “the bearded lady, Lilliputian King, and Mrs. Briggs, a lady who is the mother of three children, and yet only weighs thirty-two pounds.”⁵⁴⁸ Appearing alongside other extraordinary performers was relatively new to Chang and Eng who had almost always appeared alone in standing rooms for conversation with their guests. Reflecting the significant changes to the freak show since 1840, and the rising celebrity of P.T. Barnum and the American Museum, The Siamese Twins and their children’s exhibition at Colonel Wood’s was framed as evidence that Wood’s “out-Barnum’s Barnum in collecting human wonders.”⁵⁴⁹ Chang and Eng had also set a generic form for exhibiting conjoined twins. In their absence from the public gaze, a series of notices of “rival” conjoined twins that promised to be “far more extraordinary and interesting” than Chang and Eng had appeared.⁵⁵⁰ Even so, Chang and Eng were generally received well. They were described as industrious, hardworking, good Christian men, husbands, and fathers, even as they sometimes resorted to violence to defend their honor and had increasingly become frustrated by differences of opinions between them.⁵⁵¹ By contrast to the 1849 tour, the 1853 exhibitions seemed to have run much more smoothly and been a financial success.

24, 1853.” The Siamese Twins,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), April 15, 1853 (This last article is explicitly racist and worth a closer read, perhaps.)

548 “Siamese Twins,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), March 1, 1854.

549 “Siamese Twins,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), March 3, 1854. Reports that Chang and Eng had agreed to a five year contract with Col Wood to exhibit with their wives and children in the principal southern cities, Cuba, Peru, and Europe made headlines in 1857, but appear to have never actually materialized. (see “Col. Wood,” *Public Ledger*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, July 25, 1857; “The Siamese Twins Cheng and Eng,” *The Ohio State Journal*, (Columbus, Ohio), October 28, 1857; “Col. Wood and the Siamese Twins,” *The Daily True Delta*, (New Orleans, Louisiana), December 23, 1857.

550 “Rivals for the Siamese Twins,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), August 1, 1849; “Another Pair of Siamese Twins,” *The Semi-Weekly Eagle*, (Brattleboro, Vermont), January 6, 1851; “An Amazing Freak Of Nature,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), March 1, 1854; “An Amazing Freak of Nature,” *The Barre Patriot*, (Barre, Massachusetts), March 24, 1854; “Siamese Twins,” *The Barre Patriot*, (Barre, Massachusetts), May 18, 1855. (This last account is almost certainly some of the earliest recorded newspaper notices of the birth of North Carolina’s “other” famous conjoined twins, Millia-Christine Mckoy.)

551 “The Siamese Twins,” *The Sun*, (Baltimore, Maryland), March 16, 1854.

Chang and Eng again relied on their wives and network of trusted neighbors to help carry the load of managing their households while they were traveling for the exhibitions. In May, Robert Gilmer wrote to the brothers following up on a claim owed to them by “B. Bunker and W.A. Browne” and relaying news that their “families are all well.”⁵⁵² In June, Elisha Banner wrote to Chang and Eng updating the brothers of the improving health of the children who were recovering from “only a slight attack of [dysentery],” and taking note that everything else was moving long “prosperously at the plantation” where the crop, horses, cows, and hogs all “look well,” before offering news of a speculative copper rush in the area.⁵⁵³ When Chang and Eng received letters updating them on their homes while they were away they sometimes wrote back to their families with additional instruction and news. In an October letter from Chang and Eng to their wives and children, for example, Adelaide was instructed to have their slaves manage to sow the fields and ready the pigs for market.⁵⁵⁴ The collective efforts seemed to be successful in the brothers’ absence. In November 1853, Robert Gilmer followed up, writing to Chang and Eng from Mount Airy that Sarah reported overseeing the gathering of the corn crop (“the best crop that you have ever had on the place”), dug the potatoes, and successfully sent the produce to their seller who expected a strong return.⁵⁵⁵ Even with the successes back home, the travel away from their families was a strain on Chang and Eng. For example, in a December 1853 letter, Eng Bunker

552 Letter, Robert Gilmer to Chang and Eng Bunker, May 13, 1853. Chang and Eng Bunker Papers #3761, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

553 Letter, Elisha Banner to Chang and Eng Bunker, June 23, 1853. Chang and Eng Bunker Papers #3761, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

554 Joseph Orser holds in his possession an interesting collection of letters written by Chang and Eng and their wives during the 1853-1854 tour that I have relied upon. Those letters include Letter, Chang and Eng to Wives and Children, October 11, 1853; Letter, Chang and Eng to Sarah, December 8, 1853; Letter, Adelaide to Husband and Children, February 20, 1854; Letter, Chang and Eng to Wives and Children, March 11, 1854. (See Orser, 128; 140; 230n 55; 232 n80).

555 Letter, Robert S. Gilmer to Chang and Eng Bunker, November 13, 1853. Chang and Eng Bunker Papers #3761, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

wrote to his wife Sarah he expresses concern over the welfare of their children and support of her focusing her attention on the children.⁵⁵⁶

It is clear that the brothers cared deeply for their families and that by 1854 the tour had begun to take its toll on them and their children. Writing from Baltimore on March 19th, 1854, Chang and Eng wrote to their “dear wives & children” with the good news that Katherine and Chris were getting along well, and Kate was recovering quickly from a brief bout of “having the measles.” The brothers conclude their brief letter expressing their feeling the time “pass off very slowly” and their “long[ing] to be home” where they would find their families “all well.”⁵⁵⁷ In the contexts of this longing to return home it perhaps makes sense that Chang and Eng would not venture back out on tour again until 1860, where they would exhibit for the first (and only) time under the management of P.T. Barnum and travel across the United States to California. By the time the Siamese Twins with their Children returned to the stage nativist anxieties amplified an anti-Asian immigrant rhetoric and the impending Civil War was bubbling over in the vitriolic debates over slavery and abolition.

7.3.3 1860

Phineas Taylor Barnum (P.T. Barnum) often becomes a figure that overshadows discussions of the emergence of 19th century popular entertainment. Neil Harris describes Barnum

556 Letter, Chang and Eng to Sarah, December 8, 1853. Orser Private Collection. “Dear Sarah, we just received bad news of your accident & we sorry to hear that our child has been so badly scalded. ... hope this acciden would make you all more care full here after—we have wrote to you often befor to take good care of the children—however hope to hear no more of it—Dear sarah I am not mad with you but I want you to be care full about all the children—I do not want you to work at all—want you to look after the children first—then if you can do something well & good but must take care of the children first.” Reprinted Orser, 140.

557 Letter, Chang and Eng Bunker to “Wives and Children,” March 19, 1854. Chang and Eng Bunker Papers # 3761, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

as “the supreme symbol” of the Jacksonian era celebration of the “common man.”⁵⁵⁸ Barnum fit the bill of Jacksonian masculinity idealized a romantic “independent, successful, and audacious New Man,” Harris suggests. Harris credits Barnum’s success to his “operational aesthetic” and willful use of “deceit and exaggeration, deception and disguise, to make his fortune.”⁵⁵⁹ Barnum appears to play an outsized role in the context of Chang’s and Eng’s lives and exhibitions too. For example, it is a commonplace mistake—especially in digital forums—for Chang and Eng to be characterized as having simply “worked for Barnum.”⁵⁶⁰ In reality, Barnum had very little engagement with Chang and Eng. Chang and Eng exhibited as the “Siamese Twins with their Children” in Barnum’s American Museum in 1860 for one month before they traveled to California. In 1866 and 1868, Barnum’s name appears again alongside the Siamese Twins postwar exhibitions—although they do not appear to have worked with Barnum—and the fabrication of public speculation that the brothers were going abroad to consult about the possibility of their surgical separation. The rise of P.T. Barnum as the Greatest Showman over the 19th century offers a contrasting parallel with the emergence of the Chang and Eng as the Siamese Twins in the history of popular entertainment.

558 Neil Harris, *Humbug*, 4.

559 Neil Harris, *Humbug*, 4.

560 For example, the North Carolina History project entry for “Eng and Chang Bunker (1811-1874)” mistakenly claims Chang and Eng “worked for P.T. Barnum in the mid-1830s.” (<https://northcarolinahistory.org/encyclopedia/eng-and-chang-bunker-1811-1874/>). See also Kay Hunter, *The Duet*, in which she notes the oversized role Barnum plays in the life histories of Chang and Eng and yet mistakenly asserts that “Barnum took them over” and “they were with him for many years.” (70-74). Kay Hunter’s description of the relationship between Barnum and the Siamese Twins, while historically inaccurate, is interesting: “The twins irritated Barnum. They were too independent, too shrewd, and were never for a moment taken in by his good humoured blusterings. From their point of view, they thought him mean, and they were of the opinion that unless it was to suit his own ends, Phineas Barnum was not a man to give much away. They avoided him whenever possible, and it seems clear that the dislike was entirely mutual. Although they were with him for many years ... there was always a fundamental antagonism between Barnum and the twins, and over the years it was never entirely overcome. Nevertheless, Chang and Eng made a considerable amount of money while they were with Barnum.” (Hunter, *The Duet*, 73).

P.T. Barnum was born in Bethel, Connecticut on July 5th, 1810, a year prior to the birth of Chang and Eng in Siam. Around the same time that Chang and Eng were arriving to the port of Boston in 1829, P.T. Barnum was getting married. Barnum would spend the next five years working various jobs, including the publication of the *Herald of Freedom*, while Chang and Eng were exhibiting across the United States and England. By the time that Barnum developed “his first great entertainment feat.” the racialized enfreakment of Joice Heth as George Washington’s 161 year old nursemaid, Chang and Eng had become internationally recognized as the Siamese Twins and were touring under their own direction.⁵⁶¹

In 1835, Barnum held a bill of sale for Heth while he exhibited her throughout the major cities of the Northeastern United States. In *Showman and the Slave: Race, Death, and Memory in Barnum’s America*, Benjamin Reiss takes P.T. Barnum’s exhibition of Joice Heth and subsequent revisions as a prism to understand the 19th century American cultural understandings of race and death at the connected site of slavery and popular entertainment.⁵⁶² Barnum staged enfreaked performances of Heth as a curiously old, black mammy figure who had happily served the national cause as nursemaid to the nation’s founding father. As an origin story for the history of popular entertainment in the United States, Reiss notes the importance of the congruent relationship between slavery and cultural expressions of antiblackness in the 19th century. Barnum’s simultaneous enslavement and exhibition of Heth evokes the complexity of grappling with staged exhibitions of black slaves on the auction block as a spectacle of public entertainment and element of antiblackness outlined by Saidiya Hartman in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-*

561 Neil Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P.T. Barnum*, (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1973): 20.

562 Benjamin Reiss, *The Showman and the Slave: Race Death, and Memory in Barnum’s America*, (Harvard University Press, 2001).

Making in Nineteenth-Century America.⁵⁶³ Reiss argues Barnum's later insistence that he had been duped by Heth after his staged public autopsy of her body for profit in 1836 revealed that she was not 161 years old after all figures Heth with agency incompatible with the realities of Joice Heth living as an elderly disabled black woman living in chattel slavery.

P.T. Barnum's exhibitions of enslaved people echoed British practices of racialized enfreakment. Bernth Lindfors' study of nineteenth century ethnological show business focuses on the ways in which race and sex were played out in the anthropological displays of Sara Bartman, the "Hottentot Venus" in London and Paris in 1810. Noting that what distinguished the exhibition of Bartman and "freaks," is that she was "alleged to represent the typical and everyday," while enfreakment usually advertises the uniqueness and individuality of the performers.⁵⁶⁴ In perhaps a most famous example the exhibition of Sarah Bartmann, known to British audiences popularly as the Hottentot Venus, was exhibited in life and after her death as a specimen of black womanhood demonstrates the spectacular exhibition of Black bodies.⁵⁶⁵ By the 1860s, Barnum had attempted to erase his role as slaveholder through continual autobiographical reinvent himself out of the history of enslavement. Chang and Eng were less successful in disassociating from their role in slavery as they faced an increasingly virulent anti-Chinese racism in their exhibitions in California in 1860 and their tours after Emancipation in 1868 and 1869.

Chang's and Eng's exhibitions in the 1830s were meaningfully different than those in the 1850s because popular entertainment had changed. Around the same time Barnum became

563 Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

564 Bernth Lindfors, *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business*, 1999: 25.

565 Yvette Abrahams, "Images of Sarah Bartmann: Sexuality, Race, and Gender in Early-Nineteenth-Century Britain," in *Nation, Empire, Colony: Historicizing Gender and Race*, ed. Ruth Roach Pierson and Nupur Chaudhuri, Indiana University Press, 1998: 220–36.

“disgusted with the life of an itinerant showman” and established the American Museum in New York City, Chang and Eng retired from the itinerant touring and settled in North Carolina.⁵⁶⁶ In *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit*, Robert Bogdan begins his social constructivist history of the American tradition of oddity and profit with the P.T. Barnum’s establishment of American Museum in 1840.⁵⁶⁷ American Museum shaped popular exhibition culture as itinerant shows could be collected and moved through one place. Popular entertainment in the United States developed in relationship to changing technological developments throughout the 19th century, the emergence of a white leisure class, and rising demands for organized popular entertainment. Rapid industrial modernization and technological changes in the early 19th century played a significant role in shaping the changing contours of American and British life, particularly facilitating the rise of British and American entertainment industries.⁵⁶⁸ This can be seen in the length of the new show biographies, the changing qualities of the images in their texts and printed for circulation, and the way that the freak show was constructed by great showmen. These changes in media make for an interesting way to chart the relationship between new technologies of print and image making and the freak show as a site of popular entertainment.

In 1860, the Siamese Twins would find themselves in another shifting set of circumstances as their exhibitions became a filter through which public debates about the nation, race, and disability could play out. In October, the Chang and Eng appeared for the first time at P.T. Barnum’s American Museum in New York City along with two of their sons, Patrick and

566 Benjamin Reiss, *The Showman and the Slave: Race Death, and Memory in Barnum’s America*, (Harvard University Press, 2001): 27.

567 Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

568 See for example Richard Altick, *The Shows of London*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978) and Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

Montgomery. Within the context of Barnum's menagerie of wonders, Chang and Eng were presented in a fully aggrandizing frame. At the top of the broadside, one reporter noted that the despite the brothers' memories of Siam, "they have lost the use of their vernacular tongue, but instead thereof they have acquired a very facile use of the English language, in which they converse with fluency, and answer all proper questions put to them by their visitors, with intelligence and affability."⁵⁶⁹ As good, Christian men the brothers—and their children—were marked as exceptional precisely because they had overcome their racial and corporeal limits imposed by nature.

⁵⁶⁹ "The Siamese Twins," *Dallas Herald*, (Dallas, Texas), November 28, 1860.

The broadside printed to promote their exhibitions centered a large sketch drawing of a scene from the Bunker's wedding with the brothers dressed in suits with their conjoined band holding them together as they hold their respective wives on their arms.⁵⁷⁰ The aggrandizing enfreakment of Chang and Eng worked comparatively, as they were posed against the other exoticized curiosities staged at the American museum. Contracted for a month of exhibitions, the Living Siamese Twins were staged alongside "Zip the Man Monkey," a child of formerly enslaved parents whose small head had resulted from what today is recognized as microcephaly, an "Albino Family" that constructed children of a black woman as "white negroes," and a re-engagement with one of Barnum's most recognizable staging of the "nondescript" under the curiosity question "What is it?" that played into the pleasure of imagining the identification of a "missing link" in the natural chain of humanity.⁵⁷¹ Barnum posed the question "What is it" moves along an emergent nineteenth century theory of human evolution following Darwin's publication of *Origin of Species* and Thomas Huxley's promotion of chain of evolution sought to chart the movement from "monkey to man."

Chang's and Eng's stop in Barnum's Museum became the platform from which the brothers made their first exhibition to the West Coast of the United States as they set sail for California. In a letter written by either Patrick or Montgomery addressed to "my dear brothers and sisters" they relayed their travel path to San Francisco. On November 12, the Bunkers began aboard the steamer *Northern Light* which took them from "New York to Aspenwall [Colon,

570 Source: New York Public Library for the Performing Arts <https://lostmuseum.cuny.edu/archive/living-siamese-twins-1860>. The image is likely derived from Morefield's *Domestic Lives*.

571 John W. Cook, Jr. "Of Men, Missing Links, and Nondescripts: The Strange Career of P.T. Barnum's 'What-is-It?' Exhibition," in Rosemarie Garland Thompson (eds.) *Freakery* (New York: New York University Press, 1996). For British translation of this exhibit see Nadja Durbach, "The Missing Link and the Hairy Belle: Krao and the Victorian Discourses of Evolution, Imperialism, and Primitive Sexuality," in Marlene Tromp (ed), *Victorian Freaks*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2008): 134-154.

Panama],” where they crossed the Panamanian isthmus by rail before boarding another steamer, “*Unkle Sam*,” that took them from “Panama to California.” In total, the trip took “twenty four days,” with the first eight traveling from New York to Panama and the remaining sixteen making their way to San Francisco. Despite feeling a little “sea sick,” along the way the brothers “saw plenty of whales,” “flying fish,” “pleanty of coakes nuts and coakes nuts trees,” and ate “green corn and beens and pease,”⁵⁷² While the Bunkers were traversing an American landscape they had never seen before and attracted a good deal of interest from the brothers, they would arrive in changing Californian contexts that they had not experienced yet either. In the interim, the Northern California public was readying to receive Chang and Eng with promotional materials posted throughout the town advertising their arrival as a new platform was constructed in the Music Hall specifically for their exhibitions.⁵⁷³

By 1860, San Francisco had rapidly emerged as a growing city and a hotbed of local and national politics that shaped the twins’ reception. Racialized questions of nationality and freedom moved between public debates over whether—and how—to end Chinese immigration and the national questions around the future of the Union as talks of succession swirled around in Southern States in the face of Lincoln’s election. Within the context of San Francisco, some pro-Chinese merchants sought to reframe white laboring resentments against the influx of Chinese immigrant competition by celebrating Chinese work ethic by comparison to that of the Irish and enslaved

572 Letter, Chang and Eng Bunker to their Families, December 10, 1860. Chang and Eng Papers #3761, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Notice of their travels also made it into print: “Siamese Twins,” *The Sun*, (Baltimore, Maryland), November 15, 1860; “Rev. Mr. Benton and the Siamese Twins,” *Daily Evening Bulletin*, (San Francisco, California), December 1, 1860; “Some of Uncle Sam’s Passengers,” *Daily Evening Bulletin*, (San Francisco, California), December 6, 1860.

573 “The Siamese Twins,” *Daily Evening Bulletin*, (San Francisco, California), December 11, 1860.

blacks.⁵⁷⁴ Within this discussion Chang and Eng sought to position themselves—and were rhetorically positioned by advocates of Chinese labor—as evidence of the value of Chinese immigration.

Like the ways in which Chang and Eng sought to position themselves for inclusion within the American social life, a discourse that portrayed Chinese in California as a superior alternative to other racial and ethnic groups became a rhetorical staple. Certainly, it was not all so positive, as the brothers faced racialized rhetoric that sought to devalue the “Chinese Coolie” laborers and for the first time were described as “yellow” in a rhetorical racialization that caught on in a rush of “Yellow Fever.”⁵⁷⁵ Only a few years earlier in Mount Airy they were described by a white itinerant preacher, Sidney D. Bumpass, as “a couple of little, ugly, tawny fellows, in features resembling the African quite as much as the European.”⁵⁷⁶ Even for those who sought to highlight the “intelligent-looking men” who had venerably aged, the language of yellow racialization framed their discussions of their children who were described as “bright yellow boys.”⁵⁷⁷ What is clear is that Chang’s and Eng’s exhibitions were becoming embroiled in a new set of rhetorical frames that shaped their audiences’ responses but ultimately added to their appeal to be seen—either in admiration or disgust.

In December, Chang and Eng wrote to their families checking in on the state of the labor on the farms back home and expressing their wishes that they write to them more often. Eng wrote of their plans to exhibit for another few months, writing that they would “most likely” be “back in

574 Cosmopolite, “The Chinese Question,” letter to the editor, *Daily Evening Bulletin*, February 1, 1860; “The Chinese Question,” letter to the editor, *Daily Evening Bulletin*, February 3, 1860; Merchant, “The Chinese Question: ‘Merchant’ in Answer to ‘Cosmos’,” letter to the editor, *Daily Evening Bulletin*, February 28, 1860.

575 “The Siamese Twins,” *Daily Alta California*, December 15, 1860; “The Siamese Twins,” *Daily Evening Bulletin*, December 11, 1860. See also Lee, *Orientalism*, 43-50.

576 Letter, Sidney D. Bumpass to Mrs. Frances M. Bumpass, Greensboro Female College, Bumpass Family Papers (#1031), Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

577 “The Siamese Twins,” *Daily Evening Bulletin*, (San Francisco, California), December 11, 1860.

March maybe not till May or June.”⁵⁷⁸ Chang and Eng left New York in November 1860 following Lincoln’s election and by the time they left for California on February 11, 1861 they were preparing to return to a changed nation as six states had succeeded from the nation (South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas) and war seemed imminent. On April 12, 1861, Confederate armies attacked Fort Sumter and Lincoln called for states to raise armed forces to put down the rebellion. With Virginia, the neighboring state to their north, succeeding and on a rallying cry for a southern cause, on May 20, 1861, North Carolina was the last state to secede to the Confederacy.

7.4 Bunkers After the War: Changing Corporeal Visual Metaphors and A Push toward Death

Chang’s and Eng’s bodies were a metaphor for union and disunion. While this trope was not new to the Civil War, it was a corporeal visual rhetoric that was intensified in public discourse in the periods around visceral national sectarian discourse. The national discourse around what constitutes “America” was tied to racialized, gendered, and able-bodied normative conceptions of the people of America as the Civil War was fought around sectarian political struggle. Sectarian political struggle lent itself to the visual metaphor of the Chang’s and Eng’s bodies. The North and South are bound in the union of the United States as Chang and Eng are bound in union of “United Brotherhood.” The body of the nation is represented as two individual bodies, Chang and Eng as North and South, linked together by a fleshy band of common concern, a shared liver in the case

⁵⁷⁸ Letter, Chang and Eng Bunker to their Families, December 10, 1860. Chang and Eng Papers #3761, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

of Chang and Eng and a shared political frame, economic network, or cultural cause in the case of the sectarian rhetoric of the nation. Orser notes that the visual metaphor was particularly acute for representing cross-board conflicts between neighboring states.⁵⁷⁹ The conjoined conception of the union of the nation presents as trouble, as the two parts, brothers on one hand and the myriad of ways the nation is cut into parts (sexes, races, genders, sexualities, abilities, religions, geographies, food, dialect) and pitted against each other in a narrative of discord and resentment. In this seemingly unnatural union of two unlike things, the visible band connecting the bodies of the brothers makes their corporeal situation seem tragically fatal. One cannot seem to live with the other, and yet one cannot live without the other. Worse yet, it appears one is reliant on the other for their own well-being; united they stand, divided they die. From this troubling scene emerges the imagination of cutting the body of the nation apart, of severing the connection between the two forever whether through politics, war, or surgery.

The visual metaphor of the brothers' two sides offered a space to present the dialogue of key national figures as the question of unity was refracted in public controversies.

⁵⁷⁹ Orser, *Lives of Chang and Eng*, 148-150.

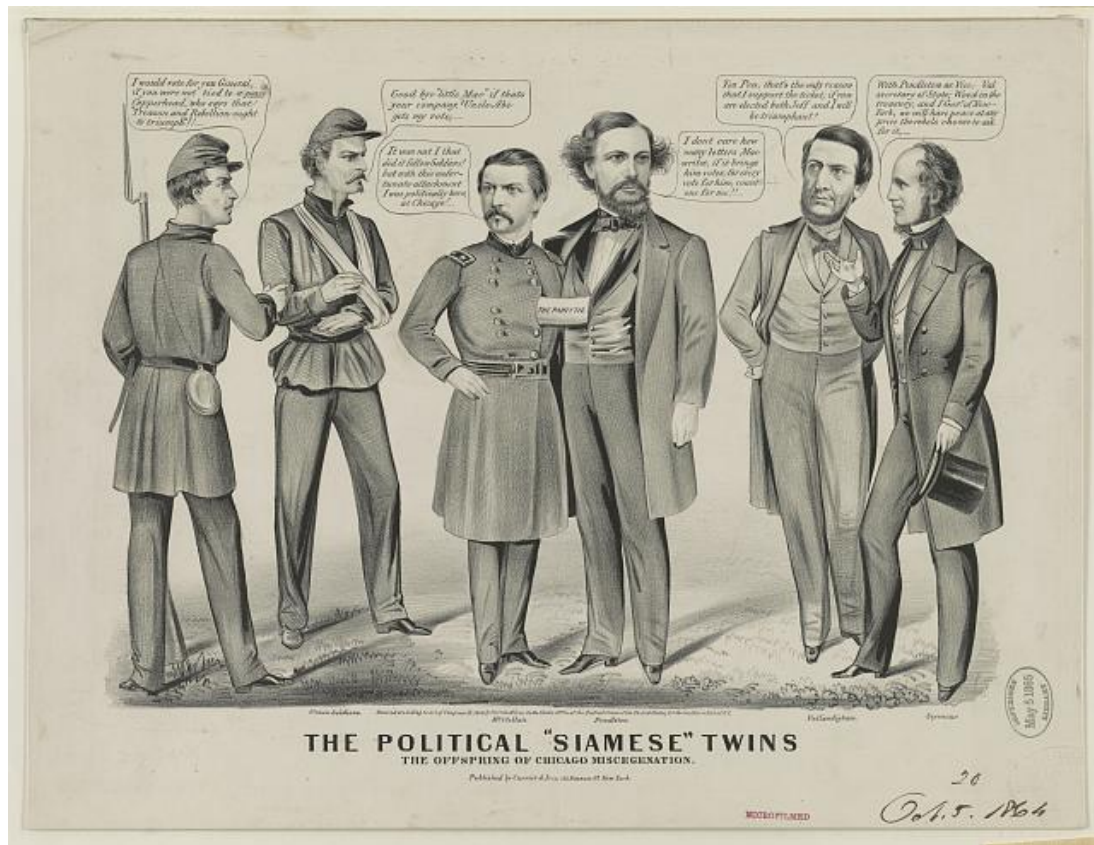


Figure 17 “The Political “Siamese” twins, the offspring of Chicago miscegenation.” [New York]: Published by Currier & Ives, 152 Nassau St. New York. c. 1864. Library of Congress

The United States Civil War pitted “brother against brother.” As a visual metaphor, the image of the particular bodies of Chang and Eng were often evoked, but they themselves were not represented as the figures. The displacement of Chang and Eng from their bodies as the metaphor of conjoined living gave way to white political figures.⁵⁸⁰ In the political cartoon (above) ridiculing the pairing of former General George B. McClellan with Peace Democrat George Hunt Pendleton as presidential and vice presidential candidates for the 1864 election, Chang and Eng are

⁵⁸⁰ Chang’s and Eng’s bodies were also made into cultural allegory by prominent cultural critics, including Thomas Nast and Mark Twain took up conjoined twins as subjects in their cultural commentary on America. In an incredible bit of writing, Cynthia Wu has charts how Mark Twain began first his reading of “The Siamese Twins” and moves to those “extraordinary twins” in his later writing following a pattern of white disassociation from Chang and Eng and the anti-Asian sentiment that increasingly stuck to their performances. Cynthia Wu, “The Siamese Twins in Late-Nineteenth-Century Narratives of Conflict and Reconciliation,” *American Literature* 80(1) 2008: 29–55.

replaced.⁵⁸¹ While the particular corporeal figuration of Chang and Eng is used for the visual metaphor, the whitening of the figures includes putting the “Siamese” twins under erasure, as evidence in the title “The Political ‘Siamese’ Twins, the Offspring of Chicago Miscegenation.” The reference to miscegenation which had been coined by the Democrats in late 1863 as a political attack on Lincoln and the Republicans is turned against the Democrats who seem to have produced an unnatural mixing of ideals.⁵⁸² Within the contexts of the Civil War the brother’s corporeal metaphor of national unity took on an intensified rhetorical power for debates over the future of the country, even as they had sons fighting for the Confederacy and would ultimately lose the much of the basis of their wealth accumulated in the enslavement of black men, women, and children,

The Civil War was costly to the Chang and Eng and the Bunker families. At the outset of the conflict Chang and Eng appeared to be getting news of fighting in the area and two of their sons had fought for the Confederacy.⁵⁸³ Christopher Wren Bunker, who served in the Confederate Army in eastern Tennessee and western Virginia, wrote a series of letters to his describing his experience of the conflict as he ended up captured, ill, and hungry over the course of his service.⁵⁸⁴

581 “The Political “Siamese” twins, the offspring of Chicago miscegenation.” [New York]: Published by Currier & Ives, 152 Nassau St. New York. c. 1864. Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003674598/>

582 Orser, *Lives of Chang and Eng*, 156. See *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Race, Applied to the American White Man and Negro*, 1863.

583 In a letter written on October 17, 1861, from Confederate soldier William Soyars to “Dear Sir,” presumably to Chang and Eng Bunker, he describes skirmishes at the Cross Lanes and Gauley River in present day West Virginia and names the soldiers killed in the fighting. (Letter from William Soyars, 17 October 1861. Chang and Eng Bunker Papers #3761, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.) Virginia Dept. of Confederate Military Records, Calvary unit records, 37th Battalion, Co. I.C. W. Bunker and D.C. Bunker, State, Government Records Collection, State of Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA. On Christopher Bunker’s experience at camp Chase, see C.W. Bunker to Father, Mother, et al., October 12, 1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, SCH.

584 Letter, C.B.W. Bunker to Nancy Bunker, October 17, 1863, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, Southern Historical Collection; Letter, C.B.W Bunker to Nancy Bunker, November 2, 1863. Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, Southern Historical Collection; Letter, C.B.W. Bunker to Nancy Bunker, November 18, 1863. Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, Southern Historical Collection; Letter, C.W.B. to Nancy Bunker, from Dublin, VA, May 14, 1864. Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, Southern Historical Collection; Letter, C.W.B. to Nancy Bunker, from Lexington Rockbridge Co, VA,

The Civil War was costly in other ways too. In April 1865, Bettie Dobson in Mount Airy to her sister Mary Dobson reported that the Yankees had passed the neighboring town of Rockland and “attacked” and “killed” some of the people in town and “plunderd [sic] a good many peoples houses.”⁵⁸⁵ While Chang’s and Eng’s homes do not seem to have been impacted, Chang and Eng and would ultimately lose the much of the basis of their wealth accumulated in the enslavement of black men, women, and children. In another blow, most of the loans that they had given out had been paid out with now worthless confederate currency.⁵⁸⁶ The financial and personal costs of the Civil War to the Bunker families reflected the disruption for many that felt in the wake of the brutal conflict.

Chang and Eng began planning a tour almost as soon as the war ended teasing innocuously that they would soon be visiting northern cities as early as August 1st, 1865.⁵⁸⁷ Some were eager to welcome Chang and Eng back in the North after the War. James Hale, for example, took notice that the brothers had been in Philadelphia and hoped to get in contact to forward along “several letters for you from home.”⁵⁸⁸ In 1867, New York showman H.P. Ingalls committed to “spare no

June 26, 1864; Letter, C.W.B. to Nancy Bunker, from Camp near Stanton, VA, July 1, 1864. Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, Southern Historical Collection; Letter, C.W.B. to Dear Father, Mother, Brothers and Sisters, from Camp Chase, October 12, 1864. Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, Southern Historical Collection.

585 Letter, Bettie Dobson to Mary Dobson, April 7, 1865. Dobson Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection; Letter, Bettie Dobson to Mary Dobson, April 6, 1865. Dobson Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection.

586 Chang and Eng put out an advertisement in December 1870 in the New York Sun to sell off a portion of the confederate money they had accumulated over the course of their time. In a letter from J.C. Shields to Chang and Eng Bunker he inquiries about purchasing a large sum of confederate money as a “great curiosity.” Office of Langley, Satterlee, Blackwell & Co. 379 Broadway, corner White Street, New York, Dec. 10th, 1870. Messrs Chang-Eng Esqs, Sirs, I noticed an advertisement on the 10th inst in the *Sun* that you had a lot of confederate money for sale. if you have please sent me a statement of how you sell it as I would like to purchase some. I have a great many curiosities and I would like to add some of each denomination of confederate money to my curiosities. Yours Trully, J. C. Shields, P.O. Box 3146. New York City. P.S. If Satisfactory my friends will purchase a lot. (Letter, J. C. Shields to Chang and Eng Bunker, 10 December 1870, Chang and Eng Bunker Papers #3761, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.)

587 “The Siamese Twins” and “The Pardoned Rebels in North Carolina” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, August 1, 1865

588 Letter, James W. Hale to Chang and Eng Bunker, December 21, 1865. Chang and Eng Bunker Papers #3761, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

pains or money to make the show a success” and asked Chang and Eng to send proofs of “a picture of your wives & yourselves,” which he would “have a lot ready” for when the show opened. Ingalls anticipated a significant attraction, but the public response among paying audiences in the North seemed less enthusiastic. Considering the losses incurred from the Civil War fought, in part, to end the enslavement of the black people that constituted an important part of the wealth Chang and Eng had accrued, some papers in the north criticized the brothers for having the gall to recuperate those losses from the paying audiences of those northern cities.⁵⁸⁹

On tour, interviews were published explaining that as Chang and Eng were staunch Confederates who had committed their sons to the lost cause out duty for the family and home, but to little avail. For many, the immediate postwar feeling was a continuing cleavage in white national brotherhood where northern Yankees figured as civilized whites and those in the south were an entirely separate race.⁵⁹⁰ While language of “separate races” is perplexing from the epidermalization of race that connects skin color to the conception of fixed races, the post-Civil War rhetoric of race also sometimes worked to create strict delineations among true white men of the North and those whose behavior in the south—owning slaves—disqualified them from such whiteness. Such rhetorical racialization was even more pronounced in the case of Chang and Eng whose associations not only with the non-white behavior of slavery but also Siam made for a shift in the racist rhetoric against Chinese stick to their exhibitions in the U.S. North. The anti-miscegenation logic of the metaphor also (re)turned against the Bunker children, who were increasingly figured as monstrous offspring of an unnatural mixing of races as the

589 “The Siamese Twins,” “Difficulties in the Shenandoah Valley,” and “Government Appointments in the South,” *New York Times*, August 1, 1865.

590 Edward J. Blum, *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865-1898*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press: 2005.

“yellowification” of Chang and Eng and Asians in America intensified in Reconstruction era that framed their postwar exhibitions as the Siamese Twins with Children. After the Civil War, Chang and Eng would return for one final world tour and find that the image they had cultivated as Southern gentry would now be used against them as an anti-Asian fervor circumscribed responsiveness to their exhibitions.

If the financial costs of the Civil War were disastrous for the brothers in 1865, two years later their families were continued to purchase new land and generally doing well—or, at least showing so. In a letter from Robert Gilmer to Chang and Eng, he notes both Christopher Bunker’s purchase of a large tract of healthy farmland and a dinner with Eng’s family wherein he “had two or three drinks of excellent brandy,” evidence that “we have an abundance of good things in this country. Along with the notes from home, Gilmer—who seems to have acted as a financial manager of the loans Chang and Eng had agreed to—runs through a series of payments that had been made and were to be made.⁵⁹¹ It seems that the financial ruins that often joined their exhibition rhetoric after the War are best taken as a matter of relative losses and by no means suggests the Bunker families had become poor. In a letter written in September 1867 from Mount Airy, Catherine Bunker writes to Eng Bunker to reassure her “dear papa,” who had expressed uneasiness about being away from home, that “there is no use for you to be so uneasy for Mama and myself will try and do the best we can, and I think the children will do the same.”⁵⁹² Catherine notes that things were going well. The family tobacco crop was thriving and Christopher, Eng’s son who had been held as a prisoner of war, had successfully set up his barn with the assistance of his uncle,

591 Letter, Robert S. Gilmer to Chang and Eng Bunker, January 16, 1867. Chang and Eng Bunker Papers #3761, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

592 Letter, Catherine Bunker to her father Eng Bunker, September 15, 1867. Chang and Eng Bunker Papers #3761, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Chang. Before she concludes, she writes that “old Aunt Grace is here yet and does very well,” very possibly a reference to Grace Gates, the woman the Yates’ father had gifted to the brothers for their marriages and appears to have stayed in residence with Eng Bunker after emancipation.⁵⁹³ It is less clear what happened to nearly all the other enslaved black men, women, and children after emancipation.



Figure 18 The Siamese Twins: Chang and Eng, A biographical sketch. With Illustrations. (J.W. Last: London, 1869)

Facing hostility and resistance in the northern cities of the U.S., in 1868 and 1869, Chang and Eng sought to take their exhibition across the Atlantic and back to the British Isles. A new show biography pictured the brothers engaging in pastoral practices of recognizable masculinity

⁵⁹³ See also Wu, *Chang and Eng Reconnected*, 145-169 for the story of a decedent of Grace who appeared at the Annual Bunker Family Reunion hoping to find more information about her ancestry.

between its pages and a figure of the brothers older in age along a farmland fence as its frontispiece was produced for circulation.⁵⁹⁴

This updated image was part of an effort to blend their age and masculine performance as worth paying to support even if there were reservations. However, their reception in England and Scotland was not much warmer than from the Northern United States.⁵⁹⁵ British newspapers printed accounts of the brothers that centered the sense of monstrosity in their exhibitions conveying disgust that men of such age subject the public to such a scene, much less themselves and their children. In some British circles the public display of deformity had a renewed sense of impropriety, especially given the medicalization of extraordinary bodies who were to be concealed from public sight. British papers also trafficked in racist anti-Chinese rhetoric. Finally, in 1870, Chang and Eng and two of the Bunker boys traveled to Germany and then Russia and had planned to continue to Austria, Italy, Spain, and France but at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussia War sent them back to the United States.

On the voyage back Chang suffered a stroke that paralyzed his right side, the side closest to his brother, while Eng remained in perfect health. While Chang and Eng would continue to live and work on their farms after some recovery, the brothers never returned to the exhibition stage alive. On the morning of January 17, 1874, Chang Bunker died. He was sixty-two years old. It was reportedly Eng's son William who first announced his uncle had died, at which point Eng replied, "Then I am going."⁵⁹⁶ For an hour, Eng suffered before dying alongside his brother. The death of Chang and Eng Bunker gave way to one more curious exhibition as their families attempted to

594 [*The Siamese Twins: Chang and Eng, A biographical sketch. With Illustrations.* (J.W. Last: London, 1869)]

595 Nannie Bunker's diaries kept from this trip offer an interesting perspective written from one of the children exhibiting with the Siamese Twins offers an interesting perspective but is beyond my scope at this time. (See Twins Papers, NCSA for diaries and photograph album).

596 Nannie Bunker to Christopher Bunker, January 19, 1874, Twins Collection, NCSA.

protect their bodies from medical curiosity.⁵⁹⁷ Eventually, however, their bodies made one last showing in the public exhibition of the autopsy.⁵⁹⁸

7.5 Conclusion

A rhetorical analysis of the lives of exhibitions of Chang and Eng Bunker from their first retirement from exhibition through their emergence as settler citizens, husbands, slaveholders, and fathers marks a curious series of events that call into question any simple notion that clear racial and ableist exclusions overdetermined the lives that the brothers lived. Even as the law restricted citizenship to free white men and figured marriage as an institution limited to white men and women, Chang and Eng were able to tenuously occupy those positions in the 1840s. Those curious—and exceptional—histories of white inclusion were never absolute, however, as the public discourse that fed off the brothers' exhibitions in the 1830s followed them to the rural backwoods of Wilkes and Surrey County, North Carolina and at each normatively progressive milestone of their lives. What becomes clearer when analyzing the various materials that evoke the Siamese twins is the ways in which the aggrandizing progressive narrative—that the brothers were increasingly just Americans—seemed never to finally reach that point of recognized

597 Brooklyn, January 29th, 1874. Mrs. Kang and Ang, We wish to negotiate with you about the Bodys of the twins it is a [?] subject but we wish you to answer by Return Mail the lowest price Cash. Confidential on our part you will oblige us very much. Name your price. We would not think of proposing the subject but we think it will be for the Benifit for the County as this [?] be so unfortunate. We Remain Respectfully Yours, Rozell, Horton and Gray, 387 Myrtle Avenue, Brooklyn N York. (Letter, Rozell, Horton, and Gray to Mrs. Chang and Eng Bunker, 29 January 1874, Chang and Eng Bunker Papers #3761, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.) See also: Augustus Rich to Jacob Rich, January 19, 1874, Chang and Eng Bunker Papers, SHC; Christopher Bunker to Stephen Decatur Bunker, February 25, 1874, Joseph Orser private collection

598 *Report of the Autopsy of the Siamese Twins*, 8-9, 17; and Allen, *Report of an Autopsy*, 3-5. Their livers continue to be on display at the Mutter Museum in Philadelphia, PA (See Wu, *Chang and Eng Reconnected*, 58-81).

inclusion and by the end of their lives looked quite different. From this archive I have offered the concept asymptotic inclusion to help name this sense that dynamics of cultural and social inclusion may make it seem as though some figures appear to getting ever closer to acceptance but seem to always continue to be excluded in a rhetoric that relies on the linguistic qualifier: “except for.”

In this chapter, I have worked through the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng Bunker from 1839-1874. Following their settlement in Wilkes County, North Carolina in 1839 the brothers adopted the surname Bunker and were granted citizenship. Public anxieties about the trouble conjoined twins posed for the practices of a democratic republic grounded in an individual right to vote saturate the responses to the news of Chang’s and Eng’s citizenship. In an even more vociferous outpouring of public attention following the Bunkers’ marriages and their subsequent fathering of children, public anxiousness not only around the sexual trouble of the domestic lives of the brothers—both as conjoined twins and as Asian men—is clearly registered. By the time that Chang and Eng returned to exhibiting themselves, now as “The Siamese Twins with their Children,” changing discourses of race in the United States began to more closely associate the brothers with a devalued Asian race in ways that stymied their efforts to assume the position and status as aggrandized good white American men. By the end of the Civil War, which had evaporated the material wealth and status the brothers had accumulated in their enslavement of at least 30 black men, women, and children, the public reception of the Siamese Twins had soured. Pushed back into a life exhibiting themselves for profit from financial exigency, the toll that the travel took on the 50 some odd years old men was extraordinary and pushed them toward their deaths in 1874. Analyzing the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng over this period extends and complicates the close readings of their experiences in the 1830s that structure the previous chapters of this project and suggests simple judgments that the brothers were either success stories or

victims of circumstance lose sight of the important textures, changes, and complexities of their lives and the cultural contexts in which they lived.

8.0 Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have offered a comparative and rhetorical history of the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng Bunker by analyzing the competing and comparative entertainment, medical, legal, and popular discourses that attempt to make sense of the presence of conjoined twin performers. In doing so, I have illustrated changing dynamics of 19th century rhetorical and visual culture and conceptions of disability, nation, race, gender, sexuality and class. Bringing together freak studies with critical, cultural, and comparative rhetorical studies, I have offered the notion of comparative enfreakment as an interdisciplinary and intersectional approach to the study of monstrosity throughout history. While a fascination with conjoined terms has an ancient past that spans much of the globe, the 19th century period I discuss marks a significant shift in the culture of exhibitions of extraordinary bodies such as the Chang and Eng—both of whom were internationally recognized and celebrated performers. Entangled with the rise of the popular entertainment and medical professionalization, the 19th century exhibitions of Chang and Eng as the Siamese Twins is an important culture-making rhetorical practice influential in shaping ideals of what constitutes the public, especially as connected to the modern development of conceptions of ability, nation, race, gender, sexuality and class. Chang and Eng not only figured as a metaphorical resource for public anxieties, but their perceived monstrosity was also visible in the everyday lived experience of the brothers fundamentally challenged the natural and juridical assumptions of autonomous individualism central to social and political life. My examination of the racialized colonial conditions for the invention of the “Siamese Twins” in Chapter 1, practices of looking and touching in the entanglement of medical and popular exhibitions in Chapter 2, monstrous intimacies and white families in Chapter 3, separation stories in Chapter 4, self-made

men in Chapter 5, and asymptotic inclusions in Chapter 6, together revealed specific ways in which disability, nation, race, gender, and sexuality have been conceived and performed in the history of the 19th century through the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng. Dealing with such questions about conjoined bodies raises profound questions about bodies—and the body public—more generally.

In this concluding chapter, I begin with arguing for a reconsideration of the “Siamese twins” as an American success story, by recognizing how Stevie Larson’s hegemonic, conjunctural, and relational approaches to making sense of Chang’s and Eng’s successes could be understood through a consideration of how asymptotic inclusion complicates the ways these approaches can be read together. Second, I argue for the value of curiosity as a keyword and methodological lens for scholarship interested in science, culture, education, radical reimagination, and more as it emerges from this dissertation. Third, I share ongoing connections for the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng found today: NASA’s corporeal connection with scientific discourse, discovery, and curiosity; bioethical conversations around surgical normalization of corporeal difference; theatrical production and mediated representations of the brothers’ lives. Finally, I offer my reflection on curiosity as both a troubling and generative lens for the completion of this project.

8.1 Reconsidering the “Siamese Twins” American Success Story

My comparative and rhetorical history of the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng Bunker throughout the 19th century has complicated common sense narratives around disability, masculinity, nationalism, orientalism, and gendered marketplace mythologies. Stevie Larson

argues Chang's and Eng's "oversized 'success story' does not square well" with Asian American and Disability Studies which "emerged out of struggles whose interest was the liberation of the dominated and the colonized—not so much integration into any social formation."⁵⁹⁹ Larson identifies three predominant approaches to making sense of Chang's and Eng's success: hegemonic, conjunctural, and relational. From the hegemonic perspective, such as Robert Bogdan's, Chang's and Eng's successes come from their inclusion into normative, white, bourgeois society.⁶⁰⁰ From the conjunctural perspective, such as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson and Leslie Bow's, Chang and Eng remained abnormal and racialized, but in ways that unsettled overdetermined categories of order.⁶⁰¹ Their successes were contingent on how various audiences responded to their unsettling presences. From the relational perspective, Chang and Eng appeared to be both normal and abnormal, white and racialized, and thus their success represented a paradox.⁶⁰² From this perspective the object of study is the complex incommensurability of the relationships between bodily processes, circulating discourses, the nation state, and Chang and Eng themselves.

Larson's triptych of approaches—hegemonic, conjunctural, relational—simplify the various attitudes toward examining and explaining the successes of Chang and Eng Bunker as the Siamese Twins and each of these approaches informs my own. Robert Bogdan's social constructivist theory of racialized and aggrandized enfreakment has informed my sense of colonial

599 Stevie Larson, "Making Exceptions: Rethinking Success through the Lives of the Siamese Twins," *Amerasian Journal*, 2013, 39(1): 62.

600 Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

601 Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) and Leslie Bow, *Partly Colored: Asian Americans and Racial Anomaly in the Segregated South* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2010).

602 Cynthia Wu, *Chang and Eng Reconnected: The Original Siamese Twins in American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012) and Leslie Bow, *Partly Colored: Asian Americans and Racial Anomaly in the Segregated South* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2010).

curiosity and considerations of the medical gaze. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's freak discourse genealogy has been invaluable equipment for understanding the processes and contexts of enfreakment as a modern shift from wonder to error marked a critical conjecture to understand disability rhetoric and politics of the 19th century. The relational perspective, offered by Wu and Bow, has also informed my reading of a range of archival materials to conceptualize, or name, the relationships of power in the changing productions of the Siamese Twins exhibitions as they navigated their relationship to Siam and slavery as they approximated white American life.

Larson's identification of a common trend to treat Chang and Eng as an "exceptional case" highlights the need for a renewed engagement with archival materials representing their lives and performances. Larson argues the hegemonic, conjunctural, and relational approaches share a set of assumptions: (1) that their position can be accounted for in normal/abnormal and white/racialized binaries, (2) the fact of their success is taken for granted while the content and functions of their successes are secondary concerns, and (3) that their success was the result of favorable national and historical conditions that make their case a curious accident of history. Larson suggests the implicit conclusion from these shared assumptions is that the "approaches we have forged in our respective disciplines can be mapped onto the twins with little disruption" as Chang and Eng are figured as "*merely* anomalies."⁶⁰³ Instead, Larson argues that such a framing obfuscates the potential that Chang and Eng may not have been "striving towards a privileged status" as much as they were "driven away from a deadly one."⁶⁰⁴ While Larson's essay is limited to analyzing the sensational promotional materials of the Siamese Twins, I have taken from his suggestion a new direction to engage the range of archival material that ground the lives and

603 Larson, "Making Exceptions," 63.

604 Larson, "Making Exceptions," 71.

exhibitions of Chang and Eng and considered the colonial relationships that appear to have been a push toward death.⁶⁰⁵

The narrative of Chang and Eng as a “success story” has a progressive telos: it begins in an account their births in Siam, tells of their adventures exhibiting through the 1830s, and celebrates their uneasy acceptance as American icons in the 1840s and 1850s, and culminates in their deaths in 1874. I began my analysis of the invention of the Siamese Twins beginning with first contact Chang and Eng had with Scottish merchant Robert Hunter in 1824. It may seem peculiar to begin a rhetorical history of the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng by centering on Robert Hunter. However, as a methodological practice it turns the critical gaze back on the earliest managers in lives of Chang and Eng re-centers colonial ways of looking and knowing as a central object of this study.⁶⁰⁶ Rather than begin from the goal of constructing another “authentic biography” of Chang and Eng Bunker, recontextualizing Robert Hunter’s “discovery” in Siam revealed how curiosity was an integral part of the everyday and institutional colonial practices of British Empire in Southeast Asia in the early 19th century that is not often captured.⁶⁰⁷

⁶⁰⁵ Describing a drive toward death is meant to evoke the sense that Chang and Eng were being driven to take personal actions within the constraints of the social formations they were navigating rather than some sense that they were autonomous agents who sought out a life as privileged Americans. I do not mean to imply “death drive” in a deterministic psychoanalytic sense. I am invoking something akin to Achilles Mbembe’s notion of “necropolitics,” the notion that some populations are pushed toward death in systems of colonialism. Social formations push Chang and Eng toward death because the white singleton world is not presumptively constructed to cultivate their livelihood. This bears out in the language of Dr. Warren in Chapter 2 when he speculates that the twins would likely die in the near future as part of the rationale for not attempting to separate the twins. It also bears out in the insurance receipt Abel Coffin takes out on the bodies of Chang and Eng “dead or alive” and the inclusion of materials to keep their dead bodies alive to exhibit in Chapter 3. Death also makes itself apparent in the context of their final exhibitions, stroke, and deaths—and final staged autopsy.

⁶⁰⁶ LuMing Mao, “Writing the Other into Histories of Rhetoric: Theorizing the Art of Recontextualization.” *Re/Theorizing Writing Histories of Rhetorics*. Ed. Michelle Ballif. (Southern Illinois UP, 2013) 41-57; LuMing Mao, “Doing Comparative Rhetoric Responsibly,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 41(1), 2011: 64-69.

⁶⁰⁷ Kay Hunter, *Duet for a Lifetime: The Story of the Original Siamese Twins*, (London: Michael Joseph, 1964); Irving Wallace and Amy Wallace, *The Two: The Story of the Original Siamese Twins*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978); Yunte Huang, *Inseparable: The Original Siamese Twins and their Rendezvous with American History*, (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2018). For critical and historical accounts see Cynthia Wu, *Chang and Eng Reconnected: The Original Siamese Twins in American Culture*, (Temple University Press:

I have argued Chang's and Eng's lives and exhibitions emerge in a push toward death from their first colonial and medical encounters and again at the end of their lives, confirming Larson's suggestion that Chang and Eng were navigating a push toward death as much as striving toward a privileged status. However, it is also important to understand how the relationships of power to take and promote life were carried out. In this dissertation, I have identified, named, and articulated tactics and practices Chang and Eng employed—performances of self-made masculinity, assertions of self-possession, and disassociations with racialized slavery—to center the complexity and dynamics of inclusion and exclusion from political, social, and cultural life. I offered the imperfect concept of asymptotic inclusion to demarcate the ways in which nation, race, ability, class, and gender shift, congeal, and are contested in the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng. While asymptotic inclusion illuminates the every approaching, but never complete inclusion of Chang and Eng into hegemonic American society, the concept is imperfect, in part, because it does not capture the rapid reversal and exclusion from American society after the U.S. civil war. Pushing for conceptual complexity requires attending to the contingent racial and singleton ideologies that constrained and enabled Chang's and Eng's lived experience at the center of 19th century political and popular life.

Philadelphia, 2012) and Joseph Andrew Orser, *The Lives of Chang & Eng: Siam's Twins in Nineteenth-Century America*, (The University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 2014).

8.2 Curiosity as Keyword: Colonial, Medical, and Popular Curiosity in the Lives and Exhibitions of Chang and Eng as the Siamese Twins

Curiosity should be a keyword for understanding relationships of power in the 19th century and entangling histories of colonialism, medicine, and popular entertainment.⁶⁰⁸ Curiosity—as with rhetoric and culture—has often been framed as a superficial interest. Framed as *mere*, curious inquiry is reduced to apolitical personal interest, just as rhetoric turns to hot air and cultural studies has been criticized for abandoning a materialistic project.⁶⁰⁹ I have found that curiosity, rhetoric, and cultural studies shared ‘*mere-ness*,’ obfuscates the political importance of these subtle—and often not so subtle—pushes of social, political, and economic life. Arguing for the political, material, and cultural significance of the study of curiosity, I join an emergent conversation animated around the political task of understanding the complex relationships between practices of curiosity and power.⁶¹⁰ From the study of the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng as the Siamese Twins the complexity and politics of curiosity in the 19th century becomes apparent.

“Curiosity is a many-splendored thing,” Perry Zurn and Arjun Shankar remark in their introduction to an interdisciplinary collection of essays that offer an ecology of knowledge for the

608 Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of culture and Society*, (Croom Helm, 1976).

609 Peter Zurn and Arjun Shankar, “What is Curiosity Studies?,” in Perry Zurn and Arjun Shankar (eds), *Curiosity Studies: A New Ecology of Knowledge*, (University of Minnesota Press, 2020): xi-xxx; Judith Butler, “Merely Cultural,” *New Left Review*, Jan/Feb 1998. <https://newleftreview.org/issues/i227/articles/judith-butler-merely-cultural>.

610 Perry Zurn, *Curiosity and Power: The Politics of Inquiry*, (Minnesota University Press, 2021). Peter Zurn and Arjun Shankar, “What is Curiosity Studies?,” in Perry Zurn and Arjun Shankar (eds), *Curiosity Studies: A New Ecology of Knowledge*, (University of Minnesota Press, 2020): xi-xxx. The ongoing political importance of curiosity can also be seen in presentational rhetoric. In Barack Obama’s inaugural address, he positions curiosity alongside honesty and courage as the essential American values that have brought national success (Barack Obama, “Inaugural Address,” Grant Park, Chicago: January 20, 2009). In contrast, some highlighted the dangers of an incurious president building an incurious world that may mark the Trump administration (Sarah Vowell, “The Danger of an Incurious President,” *New York Times*, August 9, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/09/opinion/trump-fire-fury-north-korea.html>).

study of curiosity.⁶¹¹ The multiplicities of curiosities that emerge across periods of history, place, social identity, and circumstance makes the comparative study of curiosity a historical, rhetorical, and political task. Curiosity in a Western tradition often begins from the ambivalent duality of curiosity in Greek and Latin studies wherein curiosity appears to be both criticized for drawing a person outside of their proper social horizons and celebrated for its capacity to generate knowledge. A duality of curiosity that then plays out in a progressive narrative as the medieval prohibition of curiosity as sinful, turns later into a modern embrace of curiosity as a key to social and scientific advancement.⁶¹² While much of this narrative is bound by a periodization from the 16th to 18th centuries, I have argued George Finlayson's journals and Robert Hunter's "discovery" make clear that curiosity remained an essential driving force in colonial thought and practice.⁶¹³ I have emphasized the political importance of curiosity as an animating discourse for the invention of the Siamese Twins from the start.

I have argued the archive of curiosity in the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng as the Siamese Twins is suggestive of how curiosity can both entrench social hierarchies and complement the logic of possessive individualism as Chang and Eng become situated as objects of curiosity and then commodified curiosities. First, colonial curiosity, as it appears in the study of early 19th century colonialism, offered a starting point to consider the array of relationships that sustained the Siamese Twins successes. Second, medical curiosity appeared in the study of early 19th century

611 Zurn and Shankar, "What is Curiosity Studies," xi.

612 Matthew Leigh, *From Polypragmon to Curiosus: Ancient Concepts of Curious and Meddlesome Behavior* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Lorraine Datson and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature: 1150-1750*, (MIT Press, 1998).

613 Lorraine Datson and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature: 1150-1750*, (MIT Press, 1998), 19. The 19th century curiosity decline narrative is also reflected in other prominent scholarly treatment of curiosity. See, for example, Barbara M. Benedict, *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Justin Stagl, *A History of Curiosity: The Theory of Travel, 1550-1800*, (Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995); Susan Scott Parrish, *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

history of science and offered a starting point to consider the practices of racialized enfreakment. Finally, public curiosity emerges as audiences' take up the opportunity to pay to gaze upon the staged bodies of Chang and Eng within a blended discourse of popular entertainment as civic education. Tracing the appearances of curiosity across colonial, medical, and public discourses brought into relief the ways curiosity emerged to shape cultural accounts of a world of differences.

8.2.1 Colonial Curiosity and Orientalist Enfreakment

Emerging from Kay Hunter's narrative of her great grandfather Robert Hunter's first contact with Chang and Eng, I offer colonial curiosity to name a set of relationships that are driven by an avid attraction to the unknown, clouded ways of looking, and power-laden modes of coming to recognize, know, and possess others' bodies. Curiosity conceived "as an interest in the new, the foreign, and the forbidden ... has long had a bearing on the interpretation of cultural differences and the structure of social inequalities."⁶¹⁴ Colonial curiosity can be a practice of colonial domination and exoticized attraction to difference as an insatiable drive of white masculinity. Feminists, disability scholars, and critical race scholars have argued curiosity emerges in a set of practices that amplify exoticization and orientalism, normative conceptualizations of the human body, and the ways women have been taken as objects of curious male gaze.⁶¹⁵ As white men take up the position of curious lookers, racialized and gendered others are taken as curious objects. In

614 Zurn and Shankar, p. xx.

615 Hilary Schoar, *Curious Subjects: Women and the Trials of Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Laura Mulvey, "Pandora's Box: Topographies of Curiosity," in *Fetishism and Curiosity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 53-64; Cynthia Enloe, *The Curious Feminist: Searching for Women in a New Age of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Narendra Keval, *Racist States of Mind: Understanding the Perversion of Curiosity and Concern* (London: Karnac, 2016).

her discussion of curious staring in the context of Chang and Eng, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson suggests “these men’s shapes structured their stories. And their stories took shape through staring.”⁶¹⁶ In this case shape was not only visually structured, but it was also structured orally through conversation and inquiry. Curiosity was at the scene of exoticization and orientalism that appear in the archives of colonial travel literature and the imperial collections. These archives became the foundation for many European and American museums. Curiosity also animated the 1821 British colonial mission of John Crawfurd to secure free trade agreements and private property rights with Kingdoms throughout southeast Asia, as much as the political and economic rationales. Reading the account of the Crawfurd mission along the perspectival grain of the mission’s naturalist, George Finlayson, curiosity appeared in the colonial archive as an insatiable and boundless drive to encounter the entire globe. Chang and Eng were exotic and orientalist representations as the Siamese Twins and they emerged alongside colonial travel, curiosity, and collections.

Hunter’s colonial curiosity converges with liberal discourses of free trade and racialized and ableist notions of commodification when he acts as a witness to the contract between American ship captain Abel Coffin and Chang and Eng and takes up a partial “ownership” in a venture to exhibit the “Siamese Twins” as “curiosities.” Questions of self-possession and ownership often emerged in the archive of colonial curiosity. Chang’s and Eng’s first contact, and contract, should be understood within the context of changing global dynamics of settler colonialism, slavery, and liberal notions of the possessive individual. At the center of the liberal social and political theory undergirding these shifts, was a notion of possessive individualism grounded in the right to freely engage oneself in labor, a notion premised upon the conception of the human self as something to

616 Rosemarie Garland Thompson, *Staring: How We Look* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 171.

be owned.⁶¹⁷ Following the 1807 Abolition Act, the British empire imagined a “free laboring” Asian immigrant to augment changing relationships of slave labor and opened toward a complex trafficking of “coolie” Asian laborers to satisfy the needs of changing dynamics of race and colonialism in the early 19th century.⁶¹⁸ Starting from this comparative context—rather than either the Asian immigration movements to the United States in the 1850s or even missionaries transporting Asian families to the U.S. south in the 1830s—most clearly suggests the complex, changing, and comparative racialized formations that enabled 19th century British and American colonial expansion and the invention of the Siamese Twins.⁶¹⁹

Dynamics and language over ownership changed in the discourse of possessive individualism in Chang’s and Eng’s lives and exhibitions. Chang’s and Eng’s distance from the position of the slave may be marked in their signature of a contract with Abel Coffin, representing liberal economic discourse of free will to engage in contracted labor. And yet, as the brothers traveled through the waters from Siam to Boston, they quickly became entangled in associations with slavery in Abel Coffin’s claim to ownership of the boys, as he wrote to his wife about “owning half” of “two Chinese Boys 17 years old grown together,” along with his “excellent companion” Robert Hunter.⁶²⁰ The receipt of insurance that Abel Coffin took out on the brothers’ bodies, dead or alive, as they prepared to travel across the Atlantic to Europe in 1831—a trip in which Chang and Eng traveled in steerage along with their companion servant from Siam, Tiene—raises further questions around the practices and recognition of ownership of Chang’s and Eng’s bodies. The

617 C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962): 3; 17-18.

618 Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

619 John Kuo Wei Tchen, *New York Before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Wu, Cynthia. *Chang and Eng Reconnected: The Original Siamese Twins in American Culture*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012.

620 Letter from Abel Coffin to Susan Coffin, June 28, 1829, (James W. Hale and Susan A. Coffin Papers, William L. Clements Library, The University of Michigan).

narrative association of Chang and Eng as having been “bought” and “sold” came to a comparative pitch in the wake of the Nat Turner rebellion and Virginia Assembly decision to tax the brothers as if they were being exhibited as slaves. Chang’s and Eng’s disassociation from antiblack slavery became a critical lesson as they determined to claim ownership in themselves. Chang and Eng learned the language of possessive individualism as they claimed to be “their own men” at the age of 21. Their capacities to stage themselves as the “Siamese Twins, under their own direction” throughout the 1830s also raises parallel questions over who owns the rights to profit from telling the life story of the Siamese Twins in the copyright dispute between Abel Coffin and James Hale. From Chang’s and Eng’s claims to self-possession, they became recognized as settler citizens, lords of their households, and owners of slaves. Chang and Eng attempted to demonstrate their self-possession through the ownership of others.

8.2.2 Medical Curiosity and the Rhetoric of Health and Medicine

Chang’s and Eng’s body were—and is—a medical curiosity. It was in the context of exhibition for medical men at Harvard that Chang and Eng made their debut as the Siamese Twins and it is in the context of exhibition of medical curiosity that Chang and Eng continue to be exhibited for the public at the Mutter Museum in Philadelphia. In the earliest exhibitions in the United States and London, Abel Coffin and James Hale publicly arranged private exhibitions for medical men to gather authenticating testimony and build interest prior to their public exhibitions. For medical men, the private exhibitions offered an opportunity to examine extraordinary bodies and buttress their authority to categorize and classify diversity of lived expression into increasingly

refined teratological and phrenological schema.⁶²¹ Exhibitions of Chang and Eng for medical audiences often involved the exposure of their naked bodies to the medical gaze as well as the opportunity for medical men to physically touch and test their bodies. Medical gaze is caught up in problems of possessive individualism, as the authority to look, describe, and categorize the brothers' bodies prioritizes a presumptive right to curiosity among medical men over the rights of the brothers to exert control over the scenes of medical engagement.⁶²² Suggestive of singleton ideologies that undergird medical frames of the human body, medical men across the Atlantic speculated about the possibility of safely separating the brothers surgically—an incredibly dangerous and painful prospect given the conditions of early 19th century medical practices. Public debates among medical men around the viability of surgically separating the brothers were framed to “correct the error” of their corporeal configuration. Subjected to the medical gaze and examinations under the Coffin's management, Chang and Eng put an end to the curiosity exams as they set out to exhibit themselves under their own direction. Even so, the presumed right to possess the bodies of racialized freaks after their deaths played out a final exhibition of Chang and Eng in a public autopsy at Philadelphia Medical College in 1874.

Medical curiosity at the Harvard examination of Chang and Eng shortly after their arrival to Boston, emerged as an important site to understand dynamics of race, gender, and disability in scientific discourses of teratology and phrenology. Warren's early exams were not merely a moment of history in the lives of the Siamese Twins and the Harvard Medical School, they reflect

621 Dudley Butler Wilson, *Signs and Portents: Monstrous births from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment*, Taylor & Francis, 1993; Colbert, Charles. *A Measure of Perfection: Phrenology and the Fine Arts in America*. University of North Carolina Press, 1997; Dain, Bruce. *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic*. Harvard UP, 2002; Gould, Stephen Jay. *The Mismeasure of Man*. Norton, 1996

622 Michael Sappol, *A Traffic of Dead Bodies: Anatomy and Embodied Social Identity in Nineteenth Century America*, (Princeton University Press, 2004).

the contexts of health and medicine in the early 19th century. Scientific classification in teratology—the study of monsters in the 19th century and study of abnormal anatomy and physiology in the 21st century—places extraordinary bodies in relationship within a framework that shifts from wonder to error. Within the emergent 19th century subfield of *diploteratology*, anatomists and physicians sought to examine and classify conjoined twins in relation to a singleton norm and to each other. Warren was also working in the racialized rhetoric of phrenology and other race sciences prominent in the era. Warren took the Siamese Boy as representative of the “Chinese Type” and associated their “malformation” in comparison to “American Races.” History of scientific curiosity is tied to the professionalization of medicine in early 19th century United States. Both teratology and phrenology are animated by practices of categorizing and comparing as the scientific work of classifying and comparing becomes a way of channeling curiosity to reproduce hegemonic norms of ability and race by viewing their bodies as objects of natural error from the dominant white singleton norm. The public authority of medical men to verify the authenticity of the public freak show appears as evidence of the importance of the medical discourse to racialized and ableist truths and the ways those truths shaped the cultural spaces that Chang and Eng had to navigate.

Chang and Eng became entangled with bioethical considerations around the surgical separation of the brothers to fix the natural error of two individuals being born conjoined. Public debates between medical men on the feasibility and appropriateness to medically separate Chang and Eng from each other emerged from the start. While these debates reflect the medical model of disability and the impulse to surgically “fix” natural “errors” in some instances, they also reflect a distinct moment when surgeons were not as confident in their practical ability to complete the

surgery without harm.⁶²³ Debates also articulated professional and social arguments against the impulse to intervene and call into question the inevitability of the medical hubris to “fix” disability. The national debate between medical men in the United States was played out in major newspapers. It became international news as they sent their French counterparts a show poster that had been used to promote the exhibition of Chang and Eng in New York and included their medical testimony alongside sensationalized show biography elements. The entanglement of medicine and popular entertainment continued to emerge in the exhibitions of the Siamese Twins as public speculation around their separation drew popular attention.

John Collins Warren’s shaping of the public narrative around the early lives and exhibitions of the Siamese Twins played out not only in debates with other medical men. They were also spread through the low art of medical men gossiping. Gossip is often devalued as a feminine trifle.⁶²⁴ However, the archive here suggests something different as, gossip and the lessons of the language in the letters sent between various agents are vitally important to the lived experiences of Chang and Eng and others producing the Siamese Twins. Word that John Collins Warren had been discussing Chang and Eng as if they had been “sold” by their mother and “bought” by Abel Coffin made its way to the generally assembly of Virginia in 1832, where the language of ownership was tied to the conclusion that the brothers were “owned,” and their exhibitions should

623 Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, *Cultural Locations of Disability*, (University of Chicago Press, 2005); Lennard J. Davis, “Introduction: Disability, Normality, and Power,” in Lennard Davis (ed.) *The Disability Studies Reader 5th Edition*, (New York: Routledge, 2017): 1-16; Anne Waldschmidt, “Disability Goes Cultural: The Cultural Model of Disability as an Analytical Tool,” in Anne Waldschmidt, Hanjo Berressem, and Moritz Ingwersen (eds.) *Culture – Theory – Disability: Encounters between Disability Studies and Cultural Studies*, (Verlad, 2017): 19-28.; Tobin Siebers, “Disability and the Theory of Complex Embodiment: For Identity Politics in a New Register,” in Lennard Davis (ed.) *The Disability Studies Reader 5th Edition*, (New York: Routledge, 2017): 313-332.

624 Zurn and Shankar note the gendered history of curiosity just as early modern European men were reframing curiosity as a tool of rationality and discipline in its masculine guise it also appears in the domestic sphere as a gossip and distraction in discussions of feminine curiosity. I have argued that gossip and other such trifles are significant factors in shaping homosocial male discourses as well.

be taxed as such. Gossip is also at the gendered scene of James Hale's separation from Susan Coffin as a matter of masculine honor and integrity of being insulted and setting a comparative model for Chang's and Eng's own separation from the Coffins in the years to come. I have argued that it is in those separation stories as much as the biomedical separation anxiety that we also see the gendered, ableist, and racialized dynamics that shaped Chang's and Eng's early lives in the United States.

8.2.3 Public Curiosity and Popular Entertainment

The freak show provided a context from which to understand the blend of education and entertainment as a central discourse for curious public audiences. Recall that the earliest exhibitions of the "Siamese Twins" were advertised as for "all sorts of curiosity people, from philosophers to simple gazers," each of whom "will find food for admiration in visiting these singular beings."⁶²⁵ Men, women, and children were encouraged to attend the exhibitions to satiate their curiosity and possibly edify themselves. Advertisements appealed directly to assumed characteristics of an imagined audience, including appealing to the virtue and morality of attending to their curiosity. Changes in the representations and exhibitions of Chang and Eng from the "Siamese Boys" to the "Siamese Twins" to the "Siamese Twins, with their families" draws attention to the rapid changes in the social, political, and economic developments in 19th century America and Britain.⁶²⁶ As a site for the contested relationship between the entertainment

625 "Siamese Twins," *Rhode-Island American*, 9/8/1829.

626 Rosemarie Garland Thomson, ed. *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, (New York: New York University Press, 1996), Amy E. Hughes, *Spectacles of Reform: Theater and Activism in Nineteenth-Century America*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), Marlene Tromp, *Victorian Freaks: The Social Context of Freakery in Britain*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2008.)

community and public audiences, the exhibitions of the Siamese Twins offered an important entry point into understanding public spectacle as a precondition for popular interest in listening and looking. What is clear is that the motivations for coming to the exhibitions were imagined to be broadly constituted, often mixed, and always willing to pay to gaze. Chang and Eng sought distance from the public curiosity as they settled into the North Carolina, attempting to claim space to private lives. However, public curiosity tended to follow the brothers from their citizenship, through their marriages, and fathering their children. At the end of their lives Chang and Eng faced a less curious and caring audience and more anti-Chinese racism in the context of changing United States immigration practices.

In the exhibitions of Chang and Eng as the Siamese Twins public curiosity is staged as an encounter with the disabled body, but Chang and Eng' exhibitions confirm that in their everyday operations were much more unsettled in the interaction with audiences. Marlene Tromp and Rachel Adams question the presumptive notion of the passive audience of the freak show, considering the discourses that crop up around the exhibitions.⁶²⁷ Foregrounding the instability of live performances, argues that performers and audiences were active participants in making meaning of the exhibitions beyond the managers attempts to control the representations of the performances. While the early exhibitions of Chang and Eng tended toward more invasive public exams of the brothers' bodies, Chang and Eng also looked back, spoke back, and fought back when they were exhibited. Privileging audience engagement challenges the presumptive docile silence of performers and audiences in many freak studies, suggesting that in live performances the "freaks talk back, the experts lose their authority, the audience refuses to take their seats."⁶²⁸ A rhetorical

627 Tromp, *Victorian Freaks*, 2008.

628 Rachel Adams, *Sideshow U.S.A.: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 13.

analysis of audience responses isolated how audiences made meaning from the exhibitions beyond, and perhaps counter to, the representational directives of show promoters and managers. While Robert Bogdan argues the Freak Show declined in the early 20th century, others have marked the movement of the practices of the exhibitions of extraordinary bodies in other directions.⁶²⁹ Public curiosities about conjoined twins continue to be presented in a blended genre of spectacle and education.

8.3 Ongoing Connections

The rhetorical history of Chang's and Eng's lives and exhibitions as the Siamese Twins provides a lens through which we can understand the ways in which they navigated the national, racial, gendered, sexed, classed, and normatively able structures of the worlds they moved through in the 19th century. Their rise to fame and prominence appears in the context of Jacksonian masculinity that celebrated the common man and centered a self-made man narrative, while their aggrandized ascension into Victorian gentleman society, and later the slave owning elite of North Carolina, appear to often synch with normative ideology while remaining shaped by their bodily configuration. We can understand how societies responded to the presence of Chang's and Eng's exhibitions making use of their staged difference for profit and shape of discourse in cultural life. While I have focused on articulating that double dynamic in the specific historical context of the 19th century, Chang's and Eng's exhibitions as the Siamese Twins continue to appear in

629 For example, a review of the reality television programming on *TLC* (originally The Learning Channel) includes a range of shows centering extraordinary bodies, previously including *Abby & Brittany* which followed 22-year old conjoined twin sisters Abigail and Brittany Hensel as they graduate from college, travel to Europe and got their first job as teachers. (Abby and Brittany. TLC, 2012. <https://www.tlc.com/>). See also Garland-Thomson, *Staring*, 112-114.

contemporary scientific, medical, and popular entertainment discourses today that highlight the continued importance of critically and ethically contributing to the narrative of their lives.

Historical attention to the public associations and disassociations of conjoined twins from the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng as the Siamese Twins reflect their ongoing impact on public life and imagination in the 19th century through the present. In August 2020, NASA announced that they would no longer refer to the pair of spiral galaxies in the Virgo Galaxy Cluster, NGC 4567 and NGC 4568, as the “Siamese Twins Galaxy.”⁶³⁰ NASA’s use of “Siamese Twins” to imagine the connection of the two galaxies reflects the ongoing resonances of the Chang’s and Eng’s corporeal connection with scientific discourse, discovery, and curiosity. In the 19th century, Chang’s and Eng’s corporeal figuration was used in American political, literary, and visual discourses to signify tenuous bonds of unity and brotherhood at the figurative center of political and social life. Chang’s and Eng’s corporeal connection were used to narrate a metaphorical anxiety around the unity of the nation while allowing their asymptotic inclusion into the American national citizenry. That the performances of Chang and Eng as the “Original Siamese Twins” continues to resonate in the informal discourse of NASA, and many others throughout the years, is suggestive of the ongoing curiosity of attending to the layers of symbolic and scientific meanings associated with the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng.

As objects of medical curiosity, understanding Chang’s and Eng’s lives can also contribute to bioethical conversations around surgical normalization of corporeal difference. The biographies of Chang and Eng Bunker are strategically truncated to meet the rhetorical needs of contemporary surgeons and bioethicists debating the normative presumption of surgically separating conjoined

630 National Aeronautics and Space Agency, “NASA to Reexamine Nicknames for Cosmic Objects,” August 5, 2020. <https://www.nasa.gov/feature/nasa-to-reexamine-nicknames-for-cosmic-objects>

twins. Since the 1980s, the international medical norm has been to surgically separate conjoined twins “in all cases where this is feasible.”⁶³¹ However, some bioethicists argue the presumption of surgical separation of conjoined twins unethically presumes a “singleton” assumption of what constitutes a high “quality life.”⁶³² In these arguments the lives of Chang and Eng Bunker appear frequently, sometimes simply as brief historical footnotes, but more often as extended narrations in arguments both for and against surgical separation. This is perhaps unsurprising given that Chang and Eng Bunker (1811-1874), “The Original Siamese Twins,” are frequently recognized as the “most famous” conjoined twins and the term “Siamese Twins” had become eponymous with all “conjoined twins” even into the 21st century. Such narratives are grounded in a medical model of disability that sees conjunction as an “impairment” to be “fixed.”⁶³³ Such counterfactual use of Chang’s and Eng’s biography tends toward racialized caricature and begs the question of whether a surgeon *should* cut, just because they *can*. By contrast, 19th century medical accounts offer a model of disability that centers narratives of surgical deference to the authority of the feelings of Chang and Eng over the presumption to “fix” (Warren, 1829; Pascalis, 1829; Mitchill and Anderson, 1829). Opponents of presumption surgical separation center the fact that a nearly all first-person accounts from conjoined twins oppose separation and suggest they feel they live high-quality lives together.⁶³⁴ As the “most successful” conjoined twins, Chang and Eng are frequently

631 Spitz, Lewis, “Ethics in the management of conjoined twins,” in *Seminars in pediatric surgery*, 24(5):263-264. WB Saunders, 2015; Rode, H., A. G. Fieggen, R. A. Brown, S. Cywes, M. R. Q. Davies, J. P. Hewitson, E. B. Hoffman et al. “Four decades of conjoined twins at Red Cross Children’s Hospital-lessons learned.” *South African Medical Journal* 96, no. 9 (2006): 931-940; Alastair J.W. Millar, “Chapter 124: Conjoined and Parasitic Twins,” in Arnold G. Coran et al. ed. *Pediatric Surgery* 7th edition, Elsevier (2012).

632 Jan Bondeson, “Dicephalus conjoined twins: a historical review with emphasis on viability,” *Journal of Pediatric Surgery*, 36(9), 2001: 1435-1444; Alice Domurat Dreger, “The limits of individuality: ritual and sacrifice in the lives and medical treatment of conjoined twins,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of biological and Biomedical Sciences*, 29(1), 1998.

633 Richard Hull and Stephen Wilkinson, “Separating Conjoined Twins: Disability, Ontology, and Moral Status,” in David Benatar (ed.), *Cutting to the Core: Exploring the Ethics of Contested Surgeries*, 2006; Margrit Shildrick, *Dangerous discourses of disability, subjectivity and sexuality*, (Springer, 2009).

634 Dreger, *One of us*, 2005.

used as exemplary figures in this “full life narrative.” Such narratives often presume an unmediated record of Chang’s and Eng’s opinions and romantically obscure the colonial conditions that made possible their public exhibitions and everyday violence they faced. Such narratives also whitewash Chang’s and Eng’s ascension into the southern slave owning plantation aristocracy. While I agree that the preponderance of first-person accounts is persuasive evidence against the presumption to cut, the use “exceptional success narratives of Chang and Eng” are problematic grounds for the presumption against surgical separation and suggest a need for biographical accountability in public debates on the ethics of surgically separating conjoined twins is needed. This has close connection to the intersexed movement, where the presumption against the cut is similarly grounded in an appreciation of the complexity and flexibility to celebrate living fully different lives together.

The lives of Chang and Eng and their exhibitions as the Siamese Twins continues to inspire theatrical production as well. In June 2021, a 13 episode series *Extraordinary Siamese Story: Eng and Chang* was unveiled as the first original Thai content for Walt Disney Company’s launch of their online streaming service in Thailand. The teaser for *Extraordinary Siamese Story* is framed as a “true story” that begins from Chang’s and Eng’s lives exhibiting in the 1830s and seems to emphasize the brothers’ romantic lives and marriages to the Yates sisters.⁶³⁵ In the focus on the appeal of the curiosity about the private romantic lives in the mediated representations of the brothers’ lives, *Extraordinary Siamese Story* reflects other imaginative staging of Chang’s and Eng’s lives such as Shepard Duggar’s 1936 *Romance of the Siamese Twins* and Darin Strauss’

635 “อินจัน Extraordinary Siamese Story: Eng and Chang (Official Teaser / Thai Sub).” June 18, 2021. Kantana Motion Pictures.

2000 novel *Chang and Eng*.⁶³⁶ Notably, the series stars twin Thai actors Warut and Warawut Brown performing as Eng and Chang and the Yates sisters are played by Thai actresses. Sarah Yates is played by 2012 *Asia's Next Top Model* contestant Dana Slosar and her sister, Adelaide, is played by 2017 Miss University Thailand winner Maria Poonleterlarp. Ethnicity moves across racial lines again as the white Yates sisters are played by Thai actresses.

In their review of the launch, Arpiwach Supaterrawanitt cannot seem to help themselves as they describe the production of the television series as a “conjoined (pun intended) project between Disney+ Hotstar and partner Katana Motion Pictures.”⁶³⁷ Disney+ Hotstar—itsself a recent corporate merger of the Walt Disney Company and India’s largest premium streaming platform Hotstar—appears as Disney continues to rollout new services in Southeast Asian nations including Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and the Philippines over the past two years. Thana Boonlert argues the series does not go far enough to challenge the colonial narrative. They write, “the retelling of this classic legend does not go far enough in terms of questioning Thainess, especially exceptionalism, which lends itself a special status in the region due to its non-colonial past” and suggests greater attention “to the context of colonialism that brought Eng and Chang to the U.S.” is a missing aspect from the series.⁶³⁸ It is in those colonial contexts that I began my own history of the lives and exhibitions of the Siamese Twins in the 19th century.

Complex liberal notions of possessive individualism, changes in global colonialism and slavery, and ideologies of the self-made manhood set the context for the invention of the Siamese

636 Shepherd Dugger, *Romance of the Siamese Twins, and Other Sketches*. Burnsville, NC: Edwards Printing, 1936; Darin Strauss, *Chang and Eng: A Novel*, New York: Dutton, 2000.

637 Arpiwach Supateerawanitt, “Here’s your first look at Siamese twins-inspired TV series ‘Eng and Chang,’” *Timeout*, Jun 18, 2021. <https://www.timeout.com/bangkok/news/heres-your-first-look-at-siamese-twins-inspired-tv-series-eng-and-chang-061821>

638 Thana Boonlert, “Missed opportunity to challenge insularity of Thainess,” *Bangkok Post*, July 5, 2021. <https://www.bangkokpost.com/life/arts-and-entertainment/2143439/missed-opportunity-to-challenge-insularity-of-thainess>

Twins in the 19th century and can continue to inform the ethics of understanding the production of the brothers' life stories for audiences today. As the *Extraordinary Siamese Story* charts a return of the lives and exhibitions of Chang and Eng for contemporary Thai audiences with a particular frame for their narrative and entangled as ever in the global economy of mediated productions and representations, the frame of the narrative of conjoined twin brothers from Siam that made their way to America and fell in love obfuscates the power relationships between Chang and Eng and their early managers. Understanding this context is ever important as Chang's and Eng's story is represented to Thai audience without reference to their colonial past.

8.4 Curiosity Otherwise

Curiosity has been both troubling and generative for the completion of the project. On the one hand, I have been working to name the ways that curiosity can entrench social, political, and economic hierarchies. Situated as a singleton white male scholar who does not speak Thai and writing within an American university system that demands written publication of research for personal professional development, the ethical troubles of talking about racialized enfreakment without reinscribing the oppressive attitudes I attempt to critique have been a constant methodological muddle that I continue to work through. I have relied on a thread of radical and feminist critical curiosity to help push me to risk completing my own contribution to the narratives of Chang and Eng Bunker, the Original Siamese Twins and to keep open space for understanding curiosity otherwise.

Understanding curiosities as multiple, praxiological, and political opens not only toward the entrenchment of social hierarchy, but also provides space for their inversion and transgressions.

Feminist curiosity emerges as equipment for the study of media studies and international relations as a mode of inquiry that takes seriously women as subjects and object of curiosity that challenge hegemonic ideologies.⁶³⁹ Echoes of the transgressive characteristics inherent to curiosity articulated by Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault provide a strand to consider the critical potential to push boundaries that emerges in the radical pedagogy of Paulo Freire.⁶⁴⁰ Taking curiosity comparatively may open toward the worlds that seem to have gone unnoticed or fall outside our common epistemic and material frames. Self-reflexive curiosity about curiosity and a commitment to developing radical curiosity offers a vital grounding for navigating the domestication of curiosity in the neoliberal academy and the pressing need to channel curiosity in the aim of what Anna Tsing has called “the first requirement of collaborative survival in precarious times.”⁶⁴¹

639 Laura Mulvey, “Pandora’s Box: Topographies of Curiosity,” in *Fetishism and Curiosity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 53-64; Cynthia Enloe, *The Curious Feminist: Searching for Women in a New Age of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Narendra Keval, *Racist States of Mind: Understanding the Perversion of Curiosity and Concern* (London: Karnac, 2016).

640 Perry Zurn, “The Curiosity at Work in Deconstruction,” *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*, 26 (1) (2018): 65-87; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (1878, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), preface to part 1, ss3; Michel Foucault, “The Masked Philosopher,” in *Ethics, Subjectivity, Truth*, (1980; New York: New Press, 1997), 325. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage* (New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 2001), 37, 69; Tyson Lewis, *The Aesthetics of Education: Theatre, Curiosity, and Politics in the Work of Jacques Ranciere and Paulo Freire* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

641 Anna Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015), 144, 281, 2.

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