

Freakishly, Fraudulently Modern

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***Sideshow U.S.A.: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination.* By Rachel Adams. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001. 289 pages. \$60.00 (cloth). \$19.00 (paper).**

***The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum.* By James W. Cook. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001. 314 pages. \$45.00 (cloth). \$19.95 (paper).**

***Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America.* By John F. Kasson. New York: Hill and Wang, 2001. 256 pages. \$26.00 (cloth). \$14.00 (paper).**

***Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History.* By Joy S. Kasson. New York: Hill and Wang, 2000. 319 pages. \$27.00 (cloth). \$15.00 (paper).**

***Rank Ladies: Gender and Cultural Hierarchy in American Vaudeville.* By M. Alison Kibler. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999. 283 pages. \$49.95 (cloth). \$18.95 (paper).**

RESIDUAL ELEMENTS OF A NINETEENTH- AND EARLY-TWENTIETH-CENTURY TRADITION OF live entertainment abound in contemporary U.S. popular culture. The Wild West show, for one, has become a metonym for the United States' protracted war against the Taliban and Al Qaeda: when asked what William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody would define as the nation's frontier

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today, a Chicago-based Buffalo Bill impersonator, Brian Downes, responded without hesitation: "Afghanistan. He absolutely would have been there supporting the war. After all, he offered his whole troupe to fight in Cuba in the Spanish-American War."¹ During the summer of 2002, the "New Sideshow" ran on The Learning Channel (TLC), complete with a prim woman munching insects, a tattooed artist inhaling a condom through his nose and pulling it out slowly through his mouth, and "Bebe the Circus Queen" rubbing a roaring chainsaw against her armored pudendum, sparks scattering across the stage.² One sees elements of turn-of-the-twentieth-century vaudeville, with its "something-for-everyone" ethos, on the Fox TV show "Thirty Seconds to Fame," where midget comedians, jugglers, acrobats, flexing body builders, and belly dancers each have thirty seconds of stage time to compete for a \$25,000 prize (judged by the studio audience). David Blaine, the hip New York magician, stages street spectacles of himself in periodic television specials—manacled, chained, or encased in ice—conquering all with cool resolve.

These remnant popular icons—the Wild West show, vaudeville, the freak show, professional magician, and body builder—toy with the body's capacity for pain, pleasure, and fear, and they play with the boundary between the real and the fake, the animal and the human, the self and other, and the local and the global. Taking form in the nineteenth century, these manifestations of a burgeoning mass culture also articulated the United States' historical trajectory away from an agricultural Jeffersonian "empire of liberty," to a nation that was increasingly urban, industrial, corporate, and well-connected to a growing global marketplace. Using gender, race, and class as specific sites of analysis, five recent books deftly explore the cultural manifestations and ideological implications of the nation's move into modernity. All are mindful of the ways in which technologies like photography, the penny press, and movies created a culture increasingly oriented toward the visual. Moreover, like much of the strongest work in cultural studies over the past decade, all pay attention to cultural production as a labor process.³ Using performances of gender, class, and race as their central foci, these books thus also broaden our understanding of racial formation and gender plasticity as deeply embedded historical processes.

James W. Cook's fascinating meditation on popular fraud argues that the ubiquity of cultural hoaxes and tricks in the urban marketplace during the nineteenth century provides a powerful portal into the

expansion of the American middle class. Despite the fact that this burgeoning middle class idealized sobriety, domesticity, honesty, Christian faith, and thrift, Cook demonstrates that middle-class self-definition was also predicated upon the voracious consumption of cultural fraud, or as he calls it, “artful deception.” Cook explores a series of frauds, each of which forms the basis for the book’s core chapters. Exhibited in a variety of urban locations, these hoaxes included the inanimate: from a popular trans-Atlantic chess-playing automaton to the fascinating genre of *trompe l’oeil* (“fool the eye”) painting. The living puzzles included Joice Heth, the purported 161-year-old slave and nurse of George Washington, and magicians like Harry Kellar. P.T. Barnum, the self-made Connecticut grocer-turned-impresario who managed Heth, in addition to several other key acts discussed in the book, is central to Cook’s entire project. According to Cook, Barnum evolved “from a maker of ingenious hoaxes to a professional expert on the topic, a recognized public authority on the arts of deception, both harmless and otherwise” (118). Cook’s analysis contributes greatly to an exciting and growing scholarly literature on Barnum that avoids hagiography in favor of fully placing the ubiquitous showman at the center of the volatile cultural currents of his day: slavery, abolitionism, the Civil War, and purity reform.⁴

Marking a rapid period of urbanization and punctuated by devastating financial panics and depressions (1819 and 1837), the antebellum era saw the rise of two of Barnum’s most emblematic popular figures: the Feejee Mermaid (1842), a grizzly and desiccated fusion of monkey and fish, and the freak show performer What Is It?. Since his American debut in 1860, What Is It? articulated the social formlessness of this increasingly anonymous urban marketplace on the eve of the Civil War.⁵ Played by a black man clad in fur, hunched over, and armed with a spear, What Is It? represented a racist (and racialist) caricature of evolutionary theory and black citizenship. But Cook demonstrates that What Is It?—significantly also known as the Nondescript—could be read in other, more open-ended ways: walking on all fours, he performed as both man and animal, but he could also be “trained” to walk upright (i.e. become civilized). In contrast to southern writers who argued that African Americans were destined to perform manual labor, What Is It? could barely walk. The very open-endedness of his name also suggested a fundamental ambiguity, resonating with the uneasy status of free blacks in the wake of the 1857 Dred Scott decision (143–

47). Thus, as a famous mass cultural product amid the sectional crisis and Civil War, *What Is It?* played well among abolitionist Republicans and slavery-supporting Democrats alike. He could validate the “soft” racism of Whigs/Republicans, whose “white man’s burden” ideology posited that blacks could become civilized with proper guidance, while simultaneously confirming Democratic ideologies about black “savagery” (147–48).

Cook’s chapter on modern magic during the Gilded Age captures the hustle and bustle tensions of this maturing urban society. Inspired by the Enlightenment’s emphasis on rationality, the familiar icon of the tuxedo-clad professional magician flowered in this era. Yet Cook points out that the respectable modern magician—curiously—gained popularity alongside the urban confidence man (201). Wearing street clothes, Harry Kellar and the French-born Alexander Herrmann roamed the cramped outdoor markets of New York City and other urban locales to engage in stealthy street theater: picking unsuspecting pockets and pinning the incriminating evidence on an innocent bystander, or better yet, on a nearby police officer. The magician—who subsequently exposed this hoax of his own making before a riot erupted—was seemingly the most honest one of all (211–13).

As a mode of historical analysis, artful deception could potentially slip into the same sort of timeless, ahistorical trap as the Bakhtinian concept of the carnivalesque, which Cook rejects throughout the book (for example, in explaining the cultural significance of the grotesque Feejee Mermaid). But Cook avoids this pitfall because he is so careful to illuminate the particular historical contingencies that gave this popular form such special currency. Using a rich collection of newspapers from the United States and Europe, memoirs, correspondence, autobiographies, painting, and a wide range of secondary scholarly material, Cook’s conceptual framework of artful deception forcefully illuminates key economic and social transformations in the nineteenth century.

Joy Kasson’s painterly analysis of William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody and his Wild West show also situates her subject against a backdrop of rapid urbanization, national expansion, and the closing of the continental frontier—all of which made the “vanishing” West more salable for the handsome, long-haired Cody, a former soldier, army scout, hunter, guide, prospector, and self-made man. Similar to Cook’s formulation of artful deception, Kasson is interested in the ways that Cody’s life and

Wild West show walked that fine line between truth and fiction. Cody, she argues, was an international celebrity who cultivated a powerful brand of “memory showmanship” that conflated personal memory with historical memory for his wide audiences in North America and Europe. Indeed, the Wild West show’s fusion of historical and personal memory was so strong that after seeing the Wild West reenactment, “Custer’s Last Stand,” the beer proprietor Adolphus Busch commissioned a print of this production which consequently prompted many “survivor” memories of the Battle of the Little Bighorn—even though no whites were known to have survived (246).

Even before the advent of Cody’s Wild West show in 1883, the mythic Wild West and its major character, Buffalo Bill, were already alive and well in the popular imagination in dime novels, theatrical productions, and paintings. Using correspondence, court records, newspapers, show bills, memoirs, and personal letters, in addition to visual material such as paintings, photography, lithography, and film, Kasson convincingly demonstrates that Cody and the Wild West were central to the production of culture and memory at the turn of the twentieth century; consequently, her study marks a departure from the other scholarship on Cody which is largely biographical in scope.⁶

In two parts, Kasson analyzes multiple facets of Cody’s celebrity and his show, all of which are beautifully enhanced by copious illustrations that underscore Cody’s importance to the burgeoning visual culture of his time. Part one, “Performances,” is loosely biographical, exploring Cody’s rise from modest means—born in a log cabin in 1846 on the Iowa frontier—to great riches, bad investments, financial collapse, and family turmoil, including an unsuccessful attempt to divorce his wife Louisa, all of which took place in the inscrutable public eye. Part two, “Perspectives,” analyzes the Native American performers who worked at the Wild West and the larger national meanings of the Wild West show.

Kasson shows that Buffalo Bill’s powerful brand of live “memory showmanship” transformed the regional story of the trans-Mississippi West and the Indian Wars into a national story of reconciliation for a country bitterly fractured by memories of the Civil War. Kasson maintains that the Civil War was always a key consideration in Cody’s successful marketing strategies. Although Cody himself had fought as part of the Seventh Kansas Regiment during the Civil War, his reenactments of the Indian Wars—for which the Civil War had

provided an important blueprint in fighting “total war”—were enthusiastically received on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line. In short, through its displaced abjection of Native Americans, Cody’s show made the army look good again (238).

One of the book’s strongest chapters deals with Cody’s ambivalent relationships with the Native Americans (or “Show Indians” as they called themselves) who worked at the Wild West. Kasson is mindful of the fact that the Wild West represented an opportunity both for interesting work and for cultural affirmation (in contrast to assimilation-minded reformers at the Bureau of Indian Affairs who were bent on transforming Native Americans into yeoman farmers). Moreover, the Wild West was a site of freedom offstage (163). Unlike L. G. Moses, whose otherwise excellent study of “Show Indians” downplays the implicit power relations within the broader triumphal Wild West story, Kasson is mindful that the Wild West also reified hegemonic narratives of Indian “savagery” and decline (200).⁷ Kasson’s reading of a stunning series of Native American portraits by the Photo-Secessionist Gertrude Käsebier from 1898 onward also underscores the Indian performers’ negotiation of performance and self representation. Here the performers recline, add woolen blankets to their photo sessions, smile directly at the camera, and smoke cigarettes in representations that disrupt any sort of unitary understanding of their lives (203–211). In the end, Cody, the “Show Indians,” the authentic military men, and the mythical Wild West offered audiences a jarring mix of the real and the imaginary in addition to multiple and contradictory readings of the nation’s history: at once nostalgic for a virile, preindustrial past, Cody’s Wild West—which traveled cross-country by railroad—also celebrated “progress,” “civilization,” and the brutal consolidation of the nation’s new empire.

John F. Kasson examines the predicament of American modernity through the spectacular bodies of three white men: the founder of contemporary bodybuilding, Eugen Sandow, the strenuous escape artist Harry Houdini (née Erik Weisz /Erich Weiss), and Tarzan, the fictional creation of Edgar Rice Burroughs. These men, Kasson argues, created powerful visual symbols for a generation of white men born too late to have experienced the visceral blood and guts horrors and adventure of the Civil War and who faced a future filled with deadening bureaucratic occupations of effeminizing “brain work.” The growing ubiquity of visual technologies like the photograph, the halftone, and movies, enabled these ideal bodies to reach a national consumer base.

Kasson asserts that all three figures used bodily metamorphosis to project a transformative and regenerative vision of white masculinity. Dubbed “the perfect man” by the physical education leader Dudley A. Sargent, Sandow’s rippling, self-made body was highly attractive to his copious fans. Many bought mail-order photographs of Sandow’s seminude body, while others encountered him more directly in private receptions for elite audiences where he disrobed and encouraged people to touch his hard, bare form. The ubiquity of Sandow’s body was soon matched by Houdini’s. Bound in a straightjacket, submerged in water or milk, hanging upside down from a tall building, shackled, jailed, or plunging feet first into an icy river while manacled, the wily, sinewy body of the “handcuff king” triumphantly escaped these harrowing (symbolically modern) confinements. Using the built environment as his stage, like Harry Kellar, Houdini attracted huge crowds. Edgar Rice Burroughs’s colonial fantasy of the ideal male body embodied in Tarzan—the English nobleman whose form reached superlative proportions because he was raised by apes in the Congolese jungle—was also bare. The nudity of these three figures was especially striking because, as Kasson points out, men could still be arrested—as late as 1934—for topless swimming at Coney Island. Thus, Kasson makes an important contribution to a growing literature on gender, eroticism and the body, and their relationship to purity reform at the turn of the twentieth century.⁸

Kasson demonstrates that these masculine body projects were also racially inflected. Sandow’s marbled nudity was blazingly white—he promoted himself as the “perfect type of a European man,” and his writings demonstrate his belief in notions of racial hierarchy (54). Tarzan—whom Burroughs characterized as “a contest between heredity and environment”—clearly mirrored contemporary U.S. racial violence in stories filled with the lynching of black Africans and the juxtaposition of the African ape with African people. Racial longing was also part and parcel to this metamorphic white masculine vision. By living in the wilderness and adopting an amorphously defined lifestyle of the “primitive” racial other, Tarzan resembled a movement in which white middle-class men like the illustrator Joseph Knowles took to the woods for the “wilderness cure.” Indeed, Burroughs’s creation of the Tarzan character itself constituted a form of imaginative wilderness escape for the author, who was financially liberated from the boring world of the white-collar clerk, even though Burroughs

himself remained virtually invisible, known only as the author of *Tarzan* and thus “a captive to his literary creation” (218). Ultimately, Kasson is equivocal about the vision of masculinity offered by Sandow, Houdini, and Burroughs (*Tarzan*). In an age of heightened Jim Crow segregation, race riots, lynching, and the growth of the U.S. empire overseas, these men offered a vision of white male freedom that was predicated upon the virtual bondage of others (223).

Recent scholarly works suggest that white racial identity was particularly unstable in an era of intense immigration from southern and eastern Europe.⁹ Consequently, one wonders if contemporary journalists and critics ever identified Sandow, a Prussian, or Houdini, a Hungarian Jew, as nonwhite. Or, did performative self-invention (complete with name changes and the mythology of being self-made men) help Sandow and Houdini become white? Despite these areas which deserve further exploration, Kasson has crafted a provocative and highly readable account of white, middle-class masculine longing at the turn of the twentieth century. In addition to a wealth of photographs, memoirs, and an illuminating prescriptive (“how-to”) literature, Kasson incorporates studies on bodybuilding, magic, psychoanalysis, biography, and animal/human relationships into his analysis, all of which contribute greatly to its richness.

M. Alison Kibler explores turn-of-the-century gender anxieties through the lens of vaudeville and cultural hierarchy. Vaudeville, as Kibler makes evident, presents an especially fruitful case study because it contained a dialectical fusion of respectable theater and “low” amusements like the dime museum, minstrel show, variety, burlesque, circus, and concert saloon. Led by the syndicate owner B. F. Keith, “big time” vaudeville flourished amid a backdrop of urbanization, women’s participation in the labor market, and the formation of “leisure oligopolies.” Several historians have argued that vaudeville became increasingly respectable and orderly over time, owing to its corporate consolidation, strict house rules, and respectable show offerings.¹⁰ However, by foregrounding her analysis around the interconnectedness of gender, race, class, and ethnicity, Kibler argues that vaudeville occupied a volatile position in the nation’s cultural hierarchy and was filled with raucous audiences who booed, hissed, cheered, and stomped loudly, depending upon an act’s worth. Women—both as performers and audience members—were central to vaudeville’s contested status. Throughout, her analysis is enhanced by an impressive synthesis of

primary archival materials such as diaries, show scrapbooks, programs, and correspondence, in addition to a terrific amalgam of scholarly sources on cultural theory, gender, race, and popular culture.

In eight chapters, Kibler examines vaudeville's audiences, the careers of several vaudevillian women, female blackface performance, and two vaudeville unions. More specifically, in the labor chapter, Kibler extends John Kasson's focus on middle-class male gender anxiety and modernity to the primarily working-class male vaudevillians. These performers felt increasingly alienated from their labor and went on strike in protest of capricious cancellations, usurious mandatory payments to United Booking Office agents, and increased managerial censorship of individual acts (175). Because they generally wrote their own material, vaudevillians saw themselves as sole creators of their labor: in other words, as artisans (176). However, their emphasis on individuated artistry unwittingly helped undermine efforts to promote a collective identity as workers.

Despite women's visibility on the vaudeville stage, Kibler notes that their opportunities remained limited, particularly for women of color. Black performers received segregated, shabby accommodations and were often hired to play roles which reinforced racist notions of black "savagery" and buffoonery. White women vaudevillians, however, expanded their job prospects when they donned blackface—an aspect of the history of minstrelsy that Kibler rightly notes has received little scholarly attention (115).¹¹ Overweight white actresses like May Irwin found lucrative employment playing the nostalgic "mammy" stereotype: jolly, earthy, masculine, singing so-called "coon" songs (124-29). Ethnic caricature represented another means of mobility for female performers: the large and brassy comedy performer Kate Elinore often played a bawdy, boozing, tough-talking Irish maid while her prim sister May usually played refined, American-born characters, thereby embodying the hierarchically dialectical "rank lady" and the "lady of rank" on the same stage (55).

Kibler also provides a fascinating reading of white female performers whose social categorization rendered them liminal. Critics charged that aging female vaudevillians—like Julia Arthur, a retired actress from the legitimate stage who played Hamlet—were greedy at best and freaks at worst. Similarly, reviewers often characterized the acrobat Ruth Budd as luridly mannish. She and her brother Giles switched gender roles in their performances and Budd heightened her own

“deviant” reputation with her engagement to the female impersonator Karyl Norman (165—67). Kibler connects these gender anxieties about unconventional, powerful women to Progressive-era discourses about the New Woman. Educated, independent, athletic, and challenging traditional categories of womanhood, the New Woman was often depicted as disorderly, masculine, unable to procreate, and was thus labeled a freak (14). Despite the fact that managers promoted female performers as evidence of vaudeville’s moral character, the physical presence of strong, unconventional women onstage and off—particularly when the striking Associated Actresses of America blocked traffic and hurled onions at strike breakers—contradicted traditional Victorian notions of female frailty and propriety.

The label of “freak” for liminal bodies that defy categorization is central to Rachel Adams’s exploration of freaks and American culture over the past century. Adams places the exhibition of these hybrid bodies—bearded ladies, “wild” men, conjoined twins, midgets, hermaphrodites, and others—at the heart of the nation’s modernization: the rise of the freak show in the mid-nineteenth century concurred with the rise of photography, professional medicine, and the development of a national mass culture. Like other scholars, she maintains that the freak show itself largely disappeared over the course of the twentieth century.¹² However, Adams asserts that the freak show has enjoyed a rich, imaginative afterlife, and more recently, has undergone a resurgence as a live form. Adams argues that freaks—in all of their various incarnations, live, literary, and otherwise—have represented a critical site of reckoning for ordinary Americans in wrestling with the relationship between self and other, normality and deviance (2, 16).

In honor of the freak show itself, Adams organizes her book into three separate “acts” using museums, zoos, film, literature, and photography to chart the changing place of the sideshow in modern life. Using the captive lives of Ota Benga and Ishi, the “Last Yahi,” in addition to Tod Browning’s film *Freaks* (1932), the first act explores a period roughly from 1900 to 1930, when according to Adams, audiences viewed the freak as irrevocably other. Moving into the postwar era, the second act examines the “queer” fiction of Carson McCullers and the life and work of the literary scholar Leslie Fiedler, among others, to argue that the freak was no longer a marker of complete alterity, but instead—in an age of Freudian psychology—an integral aspect of the self. The 1980s represents another chronological juncture in which the

fiction of Toni Morrison and Katherine Dunn demonstrate a return to wholesale bodily alterity. In addition to literary, film, and photographic sources, Adams incorporates correspondence, show bills, newspaper articles, memoirs, and interviews into her account, as well as literary criticism, postcolonial theory, and biography.

In addition to the book's focus on the appropriations of the freak show in high culture, Adams claims to privilege sideshow audiences, performers, impresarios, and managers to provide a more complete sense of this cultural form on "both sides of the velvet rope" (2–3), a history that is "between the lines of history" (163). Consequently, at the onset readers might expect a tour through the dingy reaches of twentieth-century carnivals, state fairs, dog and pony circuses, the Seattle-based Jim Rose Sideshow, or perhaps a trip to Gibsonton, Florida, which is home to a closely-knit retirement community of freaks (and home to the octogenarian side show manager Ward Hall who recently managed a Christian carnival sideshow in South Carolina).¹³ However, the lives of actual freak show performers are mostly missing here. Moreover, Adams's high cultural focus unwittingly reproduces itself in her otherwise fascinating discussion of the contemporary freak show scene in New York City. While it is true that many of the performers and proprietors of these intellectually hip, often ribald shows are well-versed in cultural studies and poststructuralist theory (2, 219), there is a vast hinterland of freak show workers outside of New York City across the United States for whom this characterization does not apply.

Still, taken primarily as a work of literary and cultural criticism, *Sideshow U.S.A.* succeeds beautifully. Photography, for example, is a particularly intriguing location for imaginative representations of the extraordinary body. Photography facilitated the expansion of the freak show as *cartes de visite* of freaks were sold across the nation. According to Adams: "The camera's paradoxical capacity to document reality and to deceive the eye made it an ideal device for the representation of freaks, creatures jointly born of biology, fantasy, and commerce" (113). Exploring the continuity of the fashion-cum-freak photographer Diane Arbus with earlier figures like the nineteenth-century photographer Charles Eisenmann, Adams shows that the forcefulness of freak photography lay in its juxtaposition of abnormal bodies with the minutiae of ordinary life, or as Roland Barthes put it, the "prick of unanticipated details": for instance, the curlers and

carelessly stray sprouting eyebrows on an unnamed transvestite in Arbus's famous photograph, *A Young Man in Curlers at Home on West 20th Street* (122–24). Significantly, Arbus photographed freaks in ordinary settings, which stood in stark contrast to the medical profession which pathologized and standardized the abnormal body in clinical photographs and also kept abnormal bodies under wraps in institutionalized settings.

The majority of *Sideshow U.S.A.*—unlike the other books under examination—moves largely away from live performance to focus on the creative afterlife of an ostensibly dying cultural form. Still, the central project of the freak show, according to Adams, was to “make believe.” And to this end, these imaginative appropriations of the freak show have a great deal in common with the live cultural projects of various participants in the new mass culture of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In creating nationally salable exhibits like Joice Heth and the Feejee Mermaid, P. T. Barnum engaged his audiences with artful deception, a deeply satisfying form of cultural play that grappled directly with the capricious, sneaky anonymity of the new market economy and the impromptu visual theater of urban life. With his conflation of recent history, rousing entertainment, and the teleological mythology of frontier conquest, William F. Cody was an amalgam of the real and image—the stuff of modern celebrity. The dazzling success of Houdini's harrowing escapes was dependent upon the audiences' willing suspension of disbelief. As cultural institutions, Buffalo Bill's Wild West show and B. F. Keith's “big time” vaudeville syndicate traversed the nation by rail, offering a national audience a standardized entertainment experience that paved the way for the gradual consolidation of a homogeneous national culture industry in movies, radio, and television, all of which were comprised of disembodied technologies through which the visual and aural image became synonymous with the real.

The cultural critic Jean Baudrillard has written that electronic media have subsumed the real, the representational, the sign, and signifier into a state of hyperreality that he calls “simulacra.” Consequently, the hyperreal often has more cultural power than the real itself.¹⁴ Although these distinctions between the real and simulation are potentially precious, they do have tangible cultural and political consequences. Ronald Reagan, like P.T. Barnum and William F. Cody, came to elected office after a successful career in popular entertainment. President

Reagan often stated with confidence that he was “in uniform” during World War II.¹⁵ And indeed he was, playing soldiers in a series of Warner Brothers propaganda films—a facet of his autobiography that added to his big-time patriotic credentials among veterans and fellow conservatives. Consequently, it seems only natural that Reagan’s biographer, Edmund Morris, would concoct a fictitious narrator to accompany the “real” Reagan through life as a way to reconcile this indistinguishable blending of image, self-invention, fantasy, and fact—a testament to the power of simulacra in a postmodern age.

NOTES

1. Jackie Loohaus, “Re-creating ‘Buffalo Bill,’” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (July 11, 2002), Sec. A, p. 2.

2. “The New Sideshow,” broadcast in the U.S. on TLC, June 11, 2002.

3. See for example, Bluford Adams, *E Pluribus Barnum: The Great Showman and the Making of U.S. Popular Culture* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1997); Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1997); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

4. Adams, *E Pluribus Barnum*; Neil Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P. T. Barnum* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1973); Benjamin Reiss, *The Showman and the Slave: Race, Death, and Memory in Barnum’s America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001). For an informative—but slightly hagiographic approach—see A.H. Saxon, *P. T. Barnum: The Legend and the Man* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1989); Philip B. Kunhardt, Jr., Philip B. Kunhardt III and Peter W. Kunhardt, *P. T. Barnum: America’s Greatest Showman* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995).

5. As the inventor of the American freak show as a “formally organized institution” in the 1840s, Barnum used the simultaneous embodiment of categorical opposites to define his hybrid exhibits: albino Negroes (black and white), and so on (121). On the historical development of the freak show, see Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988); and Rosemarie Garland Thomson, ed., *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1996).

6. See Sarah J. Blackstone, *Buckskins, Bullets, and Business: A History of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986); Bobby Bridger, *Buffalo Bill and Sitting Bull: Inventing the Wild West* (Austin, Texas: Univ. of Texas Press, 2002); Don Russell, *The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill* (Norman, Okla.: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1960). On the Wild West more generally, see Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows* (Urbana, Ill.: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1999).

7. L. G. Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883-1933* (Albuquerque, N.M.: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1996).

8. See Nicola Beisel, *Imperiled Innocents: Anthony Comstock and Family Reproduction in Victorian America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1997); Susan Glenn,

Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2000); Robert C. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1991); Andrea Friedman, *Prurient Interests: Gender, Democracy, and Obscenity in New York City, 1909-1945* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2000); and Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Rereading Sex: Battles over Sexual Knowledge and Suppression in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Knopf, 2002).

9. See for example, David Roediger, *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working-Class History* (New York: Verso, 1994); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Neil Foley, *White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 1998); Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago, Ill.: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995).

10. Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow / Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988), 195-97; see also Robert W. Snyder, *The Voice of the City: Vaudeville and Popular Culture in New York* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989).

11. See Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley, Calif., Univ. of California Press, 1996); Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995).

12. Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show*; see also Rosemarie Garland Thomson, ed., *Freakery*.

13. Author's conversation with Ward Hall, Oct. 13, 2001.

14. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1994), 30.

15. See Walter LaFeber, *The American Age: United States Foreign Policy at Home and Abroad since 1750* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), 406; Michael Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, the Movie: And Other Episodes of Political Demonology* (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 1988); Edmund Morris, *Dutch: A Memoir of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Random House, 1999), chs. 12-14.