



# THE HORATIO ALGER SOCIETY OFFICIAL PUBLICATION NEWSBOY



*Horatio Alger, Jr.*

1832 — 1899

A magazine devoted to the study of Horatio Alger, Jr.,  
his life, works, and influence on the culture of America.

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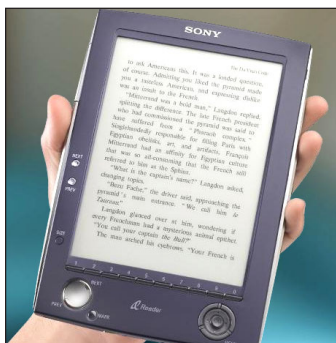
## The thrill of a new discovery

-- See Page 3



## The Gentle Boy from the Dangerous Classes

-- See Page 7



## A new way to read a book

-- See *Editor's notebook*

## President's column

There is a lot to talk about in this column. The most important news is that Bob and Wendy Sipes have just adopted a baby girl. Sofia Aryanna was born Sept. 18, 2006 at 7:21 p.m., weighed 5.5 pounds and was 18.4 inches long. She was four weeks early; however, all is fine and Sofia came home Sept. 25. I'll see if Bob and Wendy will let me put some pictures of Sofia up on the HAS Web site.

The other important news to come out of Shelbyville is that the convention dates have changed from May 3-6 to May 17-20, 2007. This date change will be described on Page 3 in this issue of *Newsboy*. However, I also encourage you to get convention information and updates at our home page ([www.ihot.com/~has](http://www.ihot.com/~has)) on the convention web page (select the "Convention information" link from the home page).

The convention Web page has a link to the hotel where we will be staying (Lees Inn in Shelbyville), and describes expense and accommodation details. You can also book your convention reservation from the Lees Inn link — be sure to ask for the Alger convention discount. Here's another way to find out more information about Lees Inn: <http://www.roadsideamerica.com/hotels-motels/hotelinfo/71647.html>

One of our longtime members is going to sell their Alger collection as a consignment auction at the Shelbyville convention. There is a link on the convention page that lists all of the items that will be offered. There are some noteworthy items on the list, which this member acquired from the Dick Seddon and Ken Butler collections.

The convention Web page also has a link to a pictorial description of the 2006 convention in Omaha. I tried to include everyone who was present at the convention in at least one photograph. If you were present at the 2006 convention, please have a look — I'll be happy to remove your photo if you are unhappy with your likeness.

The first HAS Web site upgrades are completed. You can now initiate or renew your HAS membership from the Web site if you have a PayPal account. There is also a link that enables anyone with a PayPal account (HAS member or private citizen) to make tax-deductible contributions to the 2007 *Strive and Succeed Award*. I am hopeful that tax-deductible 2007 *Strive and Succeed Award* contributions will now start pouring in...

The other major addition to the HAS Web site is an

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## HORATIO ALGER SOCIETY

*To further the philosophy of Horatio Alger, Jr. and to encourage the spirit of Strive and Succeed that for half a century guided Alger's undaunted heroes — youngsters whose struggles epitomized the Great American Dream and inspired hero ideals in countless millions of young Americans for generations to come.*

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Membership applications, renewals, changes of address and other correspondence should be sent to **Horatio Alger Society, P.O. Box 70361, Richmond, VA 23255.**

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The above rates apply to all want ads, along with ads offering non-Alger books for sale. However, it is the policy of the Horatio Alger Society to promote the exchange of Alger books and related Alger materials by providing space **free of charge** to our members for the **sale only** of such material. Send ads or "Letters to the Editor" to *Newsboy* editor William R. Gowen (PF-706) at 23726 N. Overhill Dr., Lake Zurich, IL 60047. E-mail: [hasnewsboy@aol.com](mailto:hasnewsboy@aol.com)



# The thrill of a new discovery

By Brad Chase (PF-412)

Last fall, I was out Alger book hunting here in Connecticut with a collector friend of mine, Jim Towey, who collects most everything except Alger. (Yes, some of us older folk still delight in searching out Algers in old, dusty used bookstores!) We hadn't found much up to that point as unfortunately many bookstore owners today seem to be wired directly into computer land, wheeling and dealing for used books all over the world. It seems to me that the best books are out of sight, categorized on shelves somewhere in the back of the book-stores, saved for the winning bidder whose sole exertion that day was to click "buy" with a mouse.

Anyway, not really expecting to find anything but having fun socially roaming around, we unexpectedly stumbled upon a new, used bookstore (new to us, that is) in the southeastern part of our state.

After brief cordial greetings with the owner and filled with the usual feelings of anticipation, we moseyed into the children's section, and there I was stunned to find three Algers sitting there nicely on a shelf. And, I'll be darned if one of them was a Burt Alger that I had never seen before i.e., NEVER SEEN BEFORE! For me, the Burt Alger guy, a new Burt find!! I thought I'd died and gone to Heaven ...

After 30 years of collecting, to find something that you've never seen before was indeed a real thrill for these tired old eyes. It is the kind of experience you just can't duplicate in any other way. Not even on the Net, I'll



bet. There's a sudden rush of emotion where one's heart begins to beat double-time and small beads of sweat sneak out on one's brow and you sort of look around like you're not really supposed to be there.

For me, to find a new Burt format is like a gold-digger

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## Convention dates set for May 17-20, 2007

The weekend of May 17-20, 2007, has been approved by the Board of Directors as the dates for the Horatio Alger Society convention in Shelbyville, Indiana.

The traditional first weekend in May was not available when hosts Wendy and Bob Sipes found area hotels fully booked. The H.A.S. traditionally avoids Mother's Day weekend out of respect for family events, so that left May 17-20 (and its warmer weather!) as the best option.

The hotel will be the Lees Inn in Shelbyville, which is holding a block of 30 rooms with a \$58 per night rate for a queen double, king single, or a very limited number of executive suites with small living room. Room types will

be assigned on a first come, first served basis. A few rooms equipped with Jacuzzi spas have a higher rate.

When making reservations, please mention you are with the Horatio Alger Society. The telephone number is (317) 392-2299. The Lees Inn is at 111 Lee Blvd., just off the Shelbyville exit of I-74, southeast of Indianapolis. The Lees Inn Web site is [www.leesinn.com/shelbyville/htm](http://www.leesinn.com/shelbyville/htm). You can also access this site through a hyperlink at the Horatio Alger Society's Web site at [www.ihot.com/~has/](http://www.ihot.com/~has/)

Complete details on the 2007 Horatio Alger Society convention in Shelbyville will be presented in upcoming issues of Newsboy.

## Editor's notebook

Brad Chase's article on Page 3, "The thrill of a new discovery," brings back memories of the "good old days" when we really made discoveries on our book travels. Though not frequent, they came often enough to keep us interested in "the hunt." In our tribute to Ralph Gardner last year, we republished one of his stories recalling his buying the very scarce first edition of *The \$500 Check* during a trip to Los Angeles for \$5.00 back in the 1960s.

Yes, those days are over for good, but Chase's recent discovery shows that you can indeed find something of value the old-fashioned way, by going from bookstore to bookstore.

In two trips to New England (in June and September), including visits to nearly 30 used bookstores, I saw nary an Alger except for the usual beaten-up inexpensive reprints. However, I did find enough other books, either for my collection or for resale, to keep my hopes up.

But it's never going to be the same as 20 and 30 years ago. Several stores that I had visited as recently as two or three years ago are now closed. Other stores have lesser-quality inventory on the shelves, with the better eBay stuff likely hidden in the owner's home or the shop's back room.

Even the antique malls seem to have the same weather-beaten books with little sign of turnover. Overall, it's not a pretty picture, but as Brad found out, once in a while a blind squirrel will turn up an acorn. That's why we keep burning up all that gasoline at more than three dollars a gallon. For most of us the fun is, as I said, in the hunt, which makes the "golden" find that much more rewarding!

On a more serious topic, in this issue we present the first part of Michael Moon's 1987 article, "The Gentle Boy from the Dangerous Classes," one of the groundbreaking discussions of Horatio Alger's life and career upon his arrival in New York in the 1860s. This article has been cited many times, including Carol Nackenoff in her book, *The Fictional Republic: Horatio Alger and American Political Discourse*. In fact, it was Carol who suggested we run this article as a follow-up to "The Nursery Tales of Horatio Alger" written by Michael Zuckerman in the early 1970s, which appeared in the November-December 2005 *Newsboy*.

Moon, now Professor of English at Johns Hopkins University, tackles with great care a sensitive topic, one

## President's column

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archive page (select "Horatio Alger Society Archive page" from the home page). This page is password-protected (the password is "newsboy") and contains scanned images of our incorporation documentation, constitution and by-laws, and convention host guidelines.

There are also links to convention pictorials dating back to the year 2000. If anybody has photographs of the 2002 convention, or pre-2000 conventions, please send them to me and I will add them to the archive page. And please let me know if you think of any other non-sensitive information that might reasonably be uploaded to the archive section.

Janice and I are enjoying the early fall weather here in Gardnerville, and hope you are doing the same in your home town. Janice harvested the first pumpkins, and we are looking forward to Halloween. Holly, the dog, is also doing well!

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also covered in detail in *The Lost Life of Horatio Alger* by Gary Scharnhorst with Jack Bales (Indiana University Press, 1985).

These serious academic studies do not avoid the so-called "Brewster affair." Whether we like it or not, this aspect of Horatio Alger, Jr.'s life cannot be avoided. Just a month ago, the 11<sup>th</sup> annual Horatio Alger Street Fair in Marlborough, Mass., came under fire simply because Alger's name was attached to it. The name of the fair was not changed because the controversy arose at literally the last minute and all the street displays and the promotional materials were in place. But what about the 2007 fair, which honors one of the town of Marlborough's most famous sons? This is a sensitive topic, particularly in a town where legislation is pending banning the residency of convicted sex offenders within 2,500 feet of schools, day care centers, playgrounds and other places children gather. We'll just have to wait and see whether the Horatio Alger Street Fair loses its name because a handful of activists feel use of the author's name is politically and socially incorrect.

Let's get a few facts straight. Yes, something occurred

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# The thrill of a new discovery

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hitting the tip of a nugget after digging holes all over the landscape. I've done it before but it is still a substantial thrill — a real kick! It is almost as good as finding an Alger first edition priced at \$3.00. That day's discovery has made my collecting year so far, as you can well imagine. Before I tell you details, let me provide some perspective so you can really appreciate this find with me.

Algers published by A.L. Burt were the first books I found when I started collecting well over 30 years ago. Most of the Burt formats were quality-made, and I particularly liked the pictures on the front covers showing boys in action. But I soon discovered that the pictures had little to do with the story inside. I didn't mind that, and as my collecting progressed, I bought every Burt Alger I could find around here and everywhere. I soon had a sizable stack on my bookshelves, spotted here and there, however, with a few New York Book Company, Hurst and other odds and ends of Algers. But my focus was Burt editions, and I diligently and literally bought every one I could find for the better part of 10 years.

Very soon, I discovered that Burt had published a bunch of different formats, and I wondered how many there were and how many of the Burt titles had been published for each format.

I kept on collecting Burt Algers, and other publishers as well. This large accumulation and interaction with other collectors led eventually to my producing a book about Burt Alger formats and a biography of sorts about the publisher, Albert L. Burt. The book was titled: *Horatio Alger Books Published By A. L. Burt* (Sandpiper Publishing, 1983). As many of you know, since that time I've published four additional books about other Alger publishers, essentially following the same research formula: accumulation, analysis, collector interaction synthesis and publication.

From that time until today, I keep a sharp eye out for new Burt formats which were not included in my original Burt book. So far I have become aware of only four: one entirely new one (I now call format 3A, Horse and Rider Format), one I had called a publishing freak (or error) but appears to have been produced as a set with many titles (I now call format 5A, Blank Cover Format) and two I knew existed but hadn't found in book form when I initially published my book (Format Numbers 42 and 43). Some additional titles have been found for many of the formats, but I'm proud to say that most of what I presented in 1983 is valid and has held up well over the years. More importantly, *Horatio Alger Books Published By A. L. Burt* is hopefully still a useful tool for the newer Alger collector in giving dimension to Burt Alger books when found.

One thing I neglected to emphasize in my book was any detailed discussion about dust jackets that Burt had printed to cover its Alger books. The reason for this neglect is that I hadn't found or seen many Burt jackets except as they appeared in two of the series, Joe's Luck and Chimney Corner, both of which were produced starting about 1908.

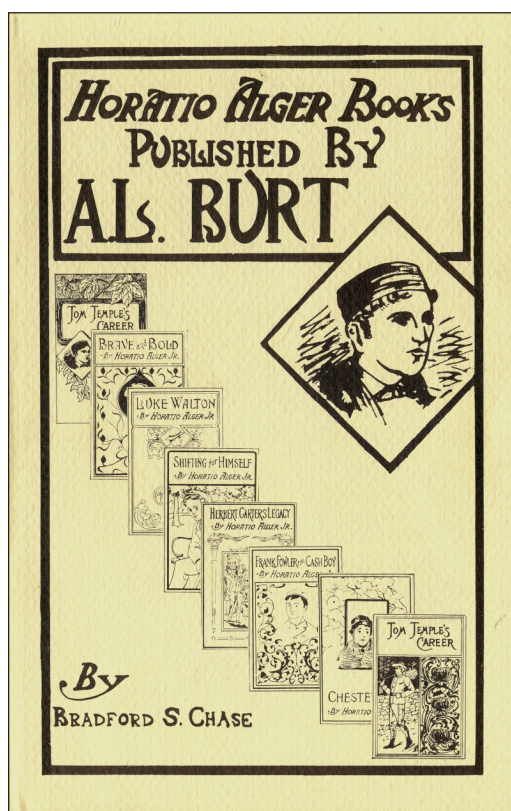
I have secretly speculated that earlier Burt formats contained jackets, but none to my knowledge has surfaced. I had seen a few Rugby Burt series books by other authors with dust jackets, but no Algers. So as time passed I mused that Rugby Series Algers very likely had jackets.

What I discovered that day last fall was a dust jacket covering a copy of the Alger title, *Struggling Upward*, Format No. 9, Three Circles Format, which Burt introduced in 1907. Of definite interest is that the spine and cover design

of the new dust jacket does not match (is not married as they say) to the Three Circles Format it covered; it has the spine and cover design of the previous Burt format in my book, Format No. 8, Ornamental Diamond Format, which Burt first introduced in 1905.

Of interest is the rectangle on the front cover of the new DJ (shown on page 3), which usually contains the actual title of the book (such as the books themselves do), shows the words "Alger Series." The Alger title is at the

(Continued on Page 6)



**To purchase this or any of Brad Chase's books on Alger publishers, write: Bradford S. Chase, 6 Sandpiper Road, Enfield, CT 06082; or e-mail [bschase@aol.com](mailto:bschase@aol.com)**

## The thrill of a new discovery

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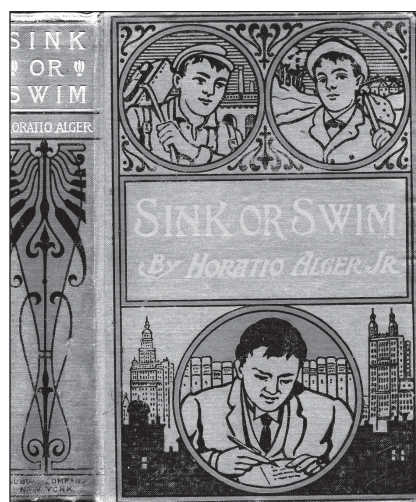
top of the spine of the DJ, the same as on the book itself. Let's see what this means. If we look at the two Formats, 8 and 9, more closely along with the newly found DJ, can we draw any conclusions?

Format 8 (the new DJ design) was introduced in 1905 and was Burt's top-of-the-line Alger seller at \$1.00 per copy in both 1905 and 1906. This format carried 64 book titles, 36 of which were by Alger and did not include the title *Struggling Upward*. Format 9 (covered by the new DJ design) was introduced in 1907 and carried 78 book titles, 51 of which were by Alger. There was an addition of 15 Alger titles, one of which was *Struggling Upward*. That title is shown at the back of the new DJ in the listing of books carried in the Alger Series For Boys for that year.

So, we can conclude that since Burt didn't introduce the Alger title *Struggling Upward* until at least 1907 and that is the title shown on the spine of the new DJ, the new DJ must have covered the Format 9 Alger that I found. We will have to wait until more DJs, which cover either Format 8 or Format 9, are found to confirm or question this conclusion. If you have one, please let me know and we'll go from there.

This book-collecting hobby is fascinating, isn't it? I keep thinking nothing new can be found but there are still many people who are continuing to discover new things that occurred over 100 years ago related to Alger books. So, the next time you sit down to see what cyberspace has to offer your Alger collection, think about what exciting finds you might discover at your local bookstore, flea market or antique mall.

Get out and experience that psychological rush like I did last fall as you bump into the next new Alger DJ, format, title or special book for your collection. You never know. I'm continually out there looking and will let you know again when I find something new and exciting like this new Burt dust jacket!



**Format No. 9 (Three Circles Format).** A copy of *Struggling Upward* in this cover design came with the newly discovered dust jacket.

## MEMBERSHIP

### New members

Salvatore R. Cipolla (PF-1095)  
4248 Capri Drive  
Pensacola, FL 32504

Juanita Durkin (PF-1096)  
7642 S. 88th Ct.

Justice, IL 60458 (708) 458-9623

Juanita is the daughter of longtime member John Juvinall (PF-537). She owns 50-plus Algers and has attended several conventions.

### Change of address

Dr. Paul Rich (PF-837)  
Policy Studies Organization  
1527 New Hampshire Ave., N.W.  
Washington, DC 20036

### New e-mail addresses

Jim Thorp (PF-574)  
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George W. Owens (PF-586)  
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Beverly Krennek (PF-968)  
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Alan Pickrell (PF-965)  
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### Corrected phone number:

James D. Keeline (PF-898)  
Phone: (619) 229-8387

*Please make these additions and changes to your official 2006 Horatio Alger Society roster booklet at your convenience. If you change your address, phone number or e-mail address, write:*

Horatio Alger Society  
P.O. Box 70361  
Richmond, VA 23255



# The Gentle Boy from the Dangerous Classes

## Part 1

By Michael Moon, Ph. D.

**T**hroongs of ragged children bent on earning or cadging small sums of money filled the streets of mid-nineteenth-century New York, if we are to credit the testimony of a large number of chroniclers of city life of the period. These genteel observers — journalists, novelists, social reformers, early criminologists — professed to be alternately appalled and enchanted by the spectacle of street children noisily and energetically playing, begging, and hawking a multitude of services and goods — shoeshines, matches, newspapers, fruit.

In considering the accounts of this scene made by those who first concerned themselves with it, one soon becomes aware that a significant number of writers respond to it with strong ambivalence. For many of them, there is an undeniable charm or beauty, strongly tinged with pathos, in the spectacle of the pauper children: the high style with which they collectively wage their struggle for subsistence exerts a powerful appeal. For some of the same observers, though, the charm of the street urchins is a siren song: beneath their affecting exteriors many of them are prematurely criminal, expert manipulators of the responses of naive and sentimental adults.

George Matsell, New York's first chief of police, initiated the vogue for writing "sketches" of the city's street children with his sensationalistic and strongly unfavorable report of 1849 on "the constantly increasing number of vagrants, idle and vicious children of both sexes, who infest our public thoroughfares."<sup>1</sup> The extensive testimony of minister and reformer Charles Loring Brace, who devoted a long career to



**THE FORTUNES OF A STREET WAIF (First Stage)**

From Charles Loring Brace, *The Dangerous Classes of New York, and Twenty Years Among Them*. New York: Wynkoop & Hallenbeck, 1872; reprinted, n.d., by the National Association of Social Workers, Washington, D.C., *NASW Classic Series*, facing Page 25.

"saving" street children, is more ambiguous, and consequently more representative of genteel response in general.

While professing to detest the criminal tendencies that he believes street life encourages in poor children — indeed, the "philanthropic" plans for them that he and his colleagues in the Children's Aid Society (founded in 1853) framed and enacted involved systematically removing them from the city — Brace nevertheless often confesses to feeling a powerful attraction toward the children themselves, especially the boys.

Brace seems to have possessed a remarkable capacity for "activat[ing] male sympathies," to borrow a phrase historian Christine Stansell has used to characterize his program: both the middle-class, reform-minded men who funded and worked in his programs and many of

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*Originally published as Michael Moon, "'The Gentle Boy from the Dangerous Classes': Pederasty, Domesticity, and Capitalism in Horatio Alger," from Representations 19 (Summer 1987): 87-110. Copyright ©1987 by the Regents of the University of California. Reprinted with the permission of the University of California Press. Professor Moon is on the English faculty at Johns Hopkins University. His areas of research are in American literature and gender studies.*

# The Gentle Boy from the Dangerous Classes

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the ragged boys whom they housed, counseled, educated, and sent away to work seem to have found compelling the particular version of male community institutionalized in his charities.<sup>2</sup>

One often hears in the language Brace and his colleagues directed toward their boy charges the familiar intensities of evangelical piety, hortatory and emotionally charged. Unsurprisingly to readers familiar with the rhetoric of nineteenth-century American Protestant revivalism, Brace's language frequently exhibits a markedly homoerotic character, as when in one of his *Sermons to News Boys* he appeals to his boy auditors' longings for an "older and wiser" male friend who would love and support them unreservedly:

Though you are half men in some ways, you are mere children in others. You hunger as much as other children for affection, but you would never tell of it, and hardly understand it yourselves.

You miss a friend; somebody to care for you. It is true you are becoming rapidly toughened to friendlessness; still you would be very, very glad, if you could have one true and warm friend.<sup>3</sup>

Although the "friendship" Brace is urging the street boys to accept here is ostensibly that of Christ, one can readily see how closely congruent a rhetoric of seduction could be with discourses of middle-class philanthropy like his, as when the adult male avows his willingness to recognize and respond (in various institutionally mediated ways) to adolescent male desires for dependency on an older, more powerful man for affection and support.

The genteel gaze of Gilded Age New Yorkers seems always to descry disturbingly mixed qualities in pauper children, and the boundaries these imputed mixtures disturb are often ones of age and gender, as witness the ambiguous "half men" (adult males)/"mere children" (minors of indeterminate gender) to whom Brace addresses his exhortations.

Despite the pederastic overtones of some of their discourse, Brace and his fellow reformers seem to have been primarily interested in seducing poor children away from their underclass environments rather than actually engaging in sexual activity with them. However, at least one man who long associated himself with Brace's boy charities — Horatio Alger, Jr. — is known to have seduced boys sexually during at

least one period of his career as well as to have actively participated in the reform movement to "seduce" New York street boys away from their milieu into an at least minimally genteel way of life. Alger has long been recognized as (in Hugh Kenner's phrase) "the laureate of the paradigms of ascent" in early corporate capitalist America; since 1971, his expulsion from the Unitarian ministry for pederasty in 1866 has been a matter of public record.<sup>4</sup>

In this essay I propose to explore how Alger's reformulation of domestic fiction as a particular brand of male homoerotic romance functions as a support for capitalism. Alger's writing provides a program cast in moralistic and didactic terms for maximizing a narrow but powerfully appealing range of specifically male pleasures: certain forms of social respectability and domesticity, the accumulation of modest wealth, and the practice of a similarly modest philanthropy toward younger needy boys.

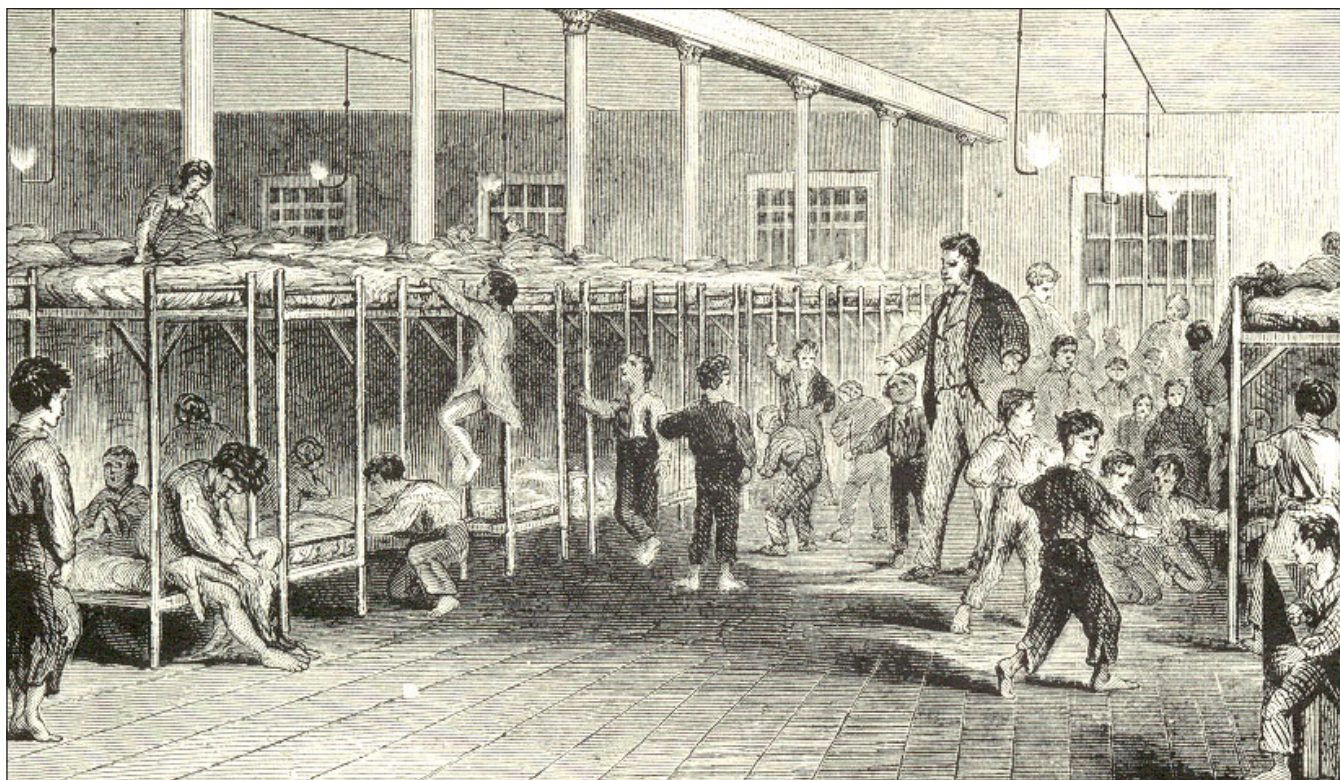
As a number of critics have noted, Alger's tales generally prove on inspection to be quite different from what the "Alger myth" — "rags to riches" for industrious poor boys — has prepared readers to expect. Rather than promising riches to boy readers, they hold out merely the prospect of respectability; also, rather than presenting an example of "rugged" and competitive individualism, they show boys "rising" through a combination of genteel patronage and sheer luck.

As Michael Zuckerman perceptively observed, "beneath [Alger's] paeans to manly vigor" one can discern "a lust for effeminate indulgence; beneath his celebrations of self-reliance, a craving to be taken care of and a yearning to surrender the terrible burden of independence." Alongside the apparent support of such capitalist ideals of the period as the self-made man and the cult of success, notions to<sup>5</sup> which Alger's writing pays lip service but fails to narrativize or thematize effectively, another agenda inconspicuously plays itself out in tale after tale — one that would appear to be the antithesis of the idea commonly associated with Alger that any reasonably bright boy can rely on his own hard work and "pluck" to catapult him to a place near the top of the Gilded heap.

Actually, Alger's tales hold out a considerably less grandiose prospect for boy readers: that any boy who is reasonably willing to please his potential employers can attain a life of modest comfort. Only a character as programmatically resistant to this prospect as *Bartleby the Scrivener* stands to lose out entirely in the new modest-demand, modest-reward ethos of the rapidly expanding corporate/clerical workplace.

A characteristic authorial aside in Alger's 1873 *Bound to Rise; or, Up the Ladder* makes apparent in unmistakable terms the large part patient passivity, rather than





#### LODGING-HOUSES FOR HOMELESS BOYS — AS THEY ARE (The Newsboys' House)

From Charles Loring Brace, *The Dangerous Classes of New York, and Twenty Years Among Them*. New York: Wynkoop & Hallenbeck, 1872; reprinted, n.d., by the National Association of Social Workers, Washington, D.C., *NASW Classic Series*, facing Page 97.

competitive aggression, plays in the scheme of his stories:

Waiting passively for something to turn up is bad policy and likely to lead to disappointment; but waiting actively, ready to seize any chance that may offer, is quite different. The world is full of chances, and from such chances so seized has been based many a prosperous career.<sup>6</sup>

“Rising” for Alger’s heroes always remains a waiting game; within this pervasive passivity, there is an active and a passive position, but there is no way for a boy to take a more direct approach to the world of work and achievement in Alger’s books.

How does one explain the gap that yawns between the reputation of Alger’s books as heroic fables of ascents from the gutter to the pinnacle of power and wealth with their actual narrative contents: the achievement — with the benefit of considerable “luck” and patronage — of a mild form of white-collar respectability that releases the boy hero from the competitive struggle he has had to wage on the street?

I propose that the answer lies not in some quirk in Alger’s personality but in some basic contradictions in his culture that the tales engage. Alger’s books can

be read — and were by generations of young readers, albeit probably largely unwittingly — as primers in some of the prevailing modes of relationship between males in corporate/capitalist culture.

I will argue further that the pederastic character of much of the “philanthropic” discourse about boys in this period is particularly marked in Alger’s texts, and that what this sexual undercurrent reveals is not so much that the leading proponents of this discourse were motivated in large part by conscious or unconscious pederastic impulses — some, like Alger, no doubt were; perhaps others were not — but that there are determinate relations between social forms engendered by the emergent Gilded Age culture and some of the quasisexual ties and domestic arrangements between males that impel Alger’s fiction.<sup>7</sup>

#### “Gentle-but-Dangerous” Horatio Alger

Alger arrived in New York City in 1866, eager to put his disgrace in Brewster, Massachusetts, behind him and to establish himself as a professional writer for boys (he had combined careers as a divinity student and fledgling juvenile author for a few years before his

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# The Gentle Boy from the Dangerous Classes

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exposure). In one of the first pieces he published after moving to New York, Alger expresses the kind of fascination with the precocity of street boys familiar from other genteel writing:

The boys looked bright and intelligent; their faces were marked by a certain sharpness produced by the circumstances of their condition. Thrown upon the world almost in infancy, compelled to depend upon their own energy for a living, there was about them an air of self-reliance and calculation which usually comes much later. But this advantage had been gained at the expense of exposure to temptations of various kinds.”<sup>8</sup>

Struggling to establish himself as a popular writer in a competitive and demanding market, Alger may well have envied the ragged boys of Brace’s *Newsboys’ Lodging House* the “self-reliance” they had acquired not from reading Emerson (who is said to have once visited the home of Alger’s parents) but from premature and extensive “exposure to temptations.”

The element of glamour he attributes to the street boy heroes of the books that followed *Ragged Dick; or, Street Life in New York* (1867) for a decade or so after is a quality that arises (as I shall try to show) from the way the figure embodies certain sexual and class tensions that were markedly present in the culture of Alger’s period, tensions that had forcefully asserted themselves at critical points in his own life.

Unlike most of his genteel contemporaries, Alger shared with the street boys he began writing about in New York the experience of having been deemed outcast and “dangerous” to the community. That the boy ideal in his fiction should magically combine both “gentle” (genteel) and “dangerous” (underclass) qualities is the generative contradiction in Alger’s work, but it bears closely on significant contradictions in his culture.

Gentility and public disgrace, respectability and criminality were states that were not supposed to interact closely in mid-nineteenth-century America, but they did so with notable violence at several points for Alger, as when his Unitarian minister father, plagued with debt throughout the author’s childhood, was forced to declare bankruptcy in 1844, or when Alger himself was ejected from the ministry for (in the words of the report of the church’s committee



## THE FORTUNES OF A STREET WAIF (Second Stage)

From Charles Loring Brace, *The Dangerous Classes of New York, and Twenty Years Among Them*. New York: Wynkoop & Hallenbeck, 1872; reprinted, n.d., by the National Association of Social Workers, Washington, D.C., *NASW Classic Series*, facing Page 32.

of inquiry) “the abominable and revolting crime of unnatural familiarity with *boys*.”<sup>9</sup>

## The Discourse of the “Dangerous Classes”

Alger’s pederasty was an act that simultaneously transgressed a number of fundamental proscriptions in his culture: its object was male rather than female, and a child rather than an adult. Although apparently the boys with whom he was sexually involved during his days as a Unitarian minister were themselves middle class, Alger may have added a third form of transgression—sex across class lines—to his offenses against the dominant morality with some of the numerous underclass boys he fostered during his thirty years’ residence in New York.<sup>10</sup>

Although there is no lack of documentary evidence to support the assertion that feelings of guilt and anxiety over real and imaginary wrongdoing were felt by many



of Alger's middle-class contemporaries, a considerable amount of literary energy in America as well as in Europe in the two decades before he began producing his books was devoted to representing the actual states of being deemed outcast or criminal as conditions that properly happened only to the denizens of a segment of the urban world somehow fundamentally disjunct from the one middle-class readers inhabited — despite the physical proximity of the two worlds.

Some of the most popular writing of the day served to provide these readers with a vicarious experience of the supposed color and romance of under-class life while reassuring them not only that the "honest" or "deserving" poor could readily transcend the worst effects of poverty but also that the squalor and violence of their lives could be readily contained — in slums, workhouses, charity wards, and prisons.

Such experiences were likewise contained (and placed on exhibit, as it were) on the fictive level in such voluminous and widely read works as Eugene Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842), G. W. M. Reynolds's *Mysteries of London* (1845-48), George Lippard's *The Quaker City* (1845), and Ned Buntline's *Mysteries and Miseries of New York* (1848). In the late 1850s, *Godey's Lady's Book* opined that the vogue for books like these, which depicted the lives of "rag-pickers, lamp-lighters, foundlings, beggars . . . murderers, etc.," was having what it saw as the undesirable effect of "widen[ing] the social breach between honest wealth and honest poverty."<sup>11</sup>

In 1867 Alger would begin pursuing his own literary method of bringing the "gentle" and the "dangerous" back into touch with one another — by locating these supposedly mutually exclusive qualities in the person of the same boy character.

An abundance of stimulating scholarship published in recent years has established the interdependence of the discourse of "the dangerous classes" in mid-to-late-nineteenth-century fiction with the forensic forms of the same discourse, in government reports, police dossiers, and sociological studies.<sup>12</sup> One of the most notable characteristics of this massive body of discourse is its frequent placement of the figure of the child in the foreground. From its inception, writing of all kinds about "the dangerous classes" took as its special concern the peril to the social order that the children of the urban poor allegedly posed.<sup>13</sup>

Writing about the children of "the dangerous classes" frequently exceeded the ostensible purpose of alerting its readership to the minatory aspects of these "dangerous" children to celebrate their beauty or charm. This conflicting tendency reaches a culmination of sorts in the heroes of Alger's street-boy fictions, in which the child of "the dangerous classes" is presented as being an estimable and even desirable figure.

### The Discourse of the "Gentle Boy"

The particular means by which the boy of the "dangerous classes" is idealized in Alger's texts involves his being conflated with another, older writerly construction, the "gentle boy." This figure was itself a hybrid, two of its principal antecedents being the exemplary "good little boy" (sometimes middle-class, sometimes not) of evangelical tract literature for children and (coming out of a quite different discursive formation) the boy version of the "natural aristocrat" central to Jeffersonian social mythology. This latter figure, the "natural little gentleman," the boy of lowly origins who manifests from early childhood the virtues and graces associated with "true gentility," was a staple of "democratic" writing for children. Alger's boy heroes are both a belated and an extreme version of him.<sup>14</sup>

One need not look far in the discourse of the "gentle boy" in nineteenth century America to appreciate that the terms *gentle* and *gentleman* were extremely unstable markers of a broad spectrum of attributes ranging from purely moral qualities like chivalrousness and benevolence to purely economic ones like the source of one's income. Given the constantly shifting meanings that *gentleman* is given in the nineteenth century, one of the few generalizations about its usage it seems to me safe to hazard is that the term's exclusionary powers are usually more important than its inclusionary ones. That is, establishing who is a gentleman is usually secondary in importance to establishing who is *not*; a *gentleman* often is not so much a description of a type of person as an attempt to draw a line between two levels of social status. This yields widely various definitions of *gentle* and *gentleman*, such as (for example) the "high" or "aristocratic" sense of the term, "a man of 'good' family and independent financial means who does not engage in any occupation or profession for gain—a sense of the term quite different from what one might call the "bourgeois" one, "a man who does not engage in a menial occupation or in manual labor to earn his living." By the first definition, to be a "true" gentleman one must be rich, leisured, and a member of an upper-class family; by the second, one need only not be a working man to qualify—that is, it excludes from its compass only lower-class men.<sup>15</sup>

Besides signifying rigid divisions and invidious distinctions between social classes, *gentle* and *gentleman* bore a number of other meanings. "Soft" definitions of *gentleman* were based not on the source of his income or on the lowest level of work that it was necessary for him to do, but on an unstable set of moral qualities that commonly included courtesy, chivalry, benevolence to "inferiors," and a lively sense of personal "honor." The

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# The Gentle Boy from the Dangerous Classes

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range was even wider (and must have been even more confusing) for boys who aspired to be "gentlemen": to be considered "gentle," boys, besides possessing various combinations of the foregoing qualities, were also expected to be (in certain relations) tractable, docile, and mild types of behavior neither required of nor even particularly admired in adult males. At the extreme of the "soft" end of the spectrum, we arrive at a stretch of potentially hazardous meanings for males living in a society in which gender roles were becoming ever more polarized, elaborated, and rigidly prescribed: "sweet," "delicate," "tender," "fond," "loving," "affectionate." Embodying such qualities, even when they were part of behaving in a "gentle" or "gentlemanly" manner, could be a treacherous business for nineteenth-century boys, especially if these qualities came into play not between the boy and an infant or female family member, where they might seem appropriate, but between one boy and another or between a boy and a man. At the "soft" end of the "gentle" spectrum, disgrace by (alleged) feminization threatened the unwary boy.<sup>16</sup> Social constructions of such matters as what success and security, manliness and "gentle" behavior are, as well as what is truly "dangerous" about the urban poor, are some of the basic elements of which Alger's tales are composed. His attempts to stabilize in didactic narratives the volatile field of meanings these terms represented in his culture remain instructive in ways he could not have anticipated.

## Ragged Dick and Tattered Tom

Perhaps the master trope, insofar as there is one, for nineteenth-century attitudes toward the urban poor is the figure common to pictorial representations of the proletarian uprisings in Paris in 1830: that of the young or mature man, usually depicted half naked, who is possessed of a beautiful, muscular torso and a bestial face.<sup>17</sup> Middle-class facial beauty, lower-class muscle; middle-class mentality, lower-class bodiliness; middle-class refinement, lower-class brutality; lower-class vigor and middle-class malaise; an overbred middle class and an overbreeding lower class — these are some of the constants in the shifting spectrum of stereotypical paradigms of social class in which nineteenth-century sociologists, journalists, novelists, and illustrators traded. Ragged Dick, the prototypical Alger hero, is not com-

posed of ugly face and muscular torso as a thoroughly "dangerous" youth in popular representation might be: other qualities are mixed in him. As the hero-to-be of Alger's particular brand of male homoerotic domestic romance, he conspicuously combines, to begin with, the qualities of appearing both dirty and handsome.<sup>18</sup>

But in spite of his dirt and rags there was something about Dick that was attractive. It was easy to see if he had been clean and well dressed he would have been decidedly good looking. (*Ragged Dick*, 40)

Sexual attractiveness is the one characteristic Alger's heroes all have in common. "Luck comes to them, and 'pluck they exhibit when it is required, but their really defining attribute is good looks. Statements like the following occur ritualistically on the opening pages of the books:

Both [boys] had bright and attractive faces. . . . [Dick] had a fresh color which spoke of good health, and was well-formed and strong. (*Fame and Fortune*, 53)

In spite of the dirt, his face was strikingly handsome. (*Phil the Fiddler*, 283)

He was a strongly-made and well-knit boy of nearly sixteen, but he was poorly dressed. . . . Yet his face was attractive. (*Jed the Poorhouse Boy*, 401)

The narrators of Alger's tales are fierce discriminators of good looks in boys, which they suggest might be obscured for other spectators by shabbiness and grime. The boy's initially mixed appearance, the good looks revealing themselves despite the physical evidence of poverty — dirt and rags — is the infallible sign that one of Alger's boy characters is likely to emerge from his outcast condition to become a "gentle/dangerous" boy.

Besides the handsome faces and comely bodies visible despite their shabby coverings, another strikingly homoerotic characteristic of Alger's writing is the element of seduction involved in the first steps of the ragged hero's conversion to respectability through his chance street encounters with genteel boys and men. Here the mixing is not figured on the hero's person (handsome/dirty) but on the social level: "dangerous" (street boy) and "gentle" (genteel boy or man) not only meet but make lasting impressions on one another. This impression making takes the form of a mutual seduction of sorts, as in the following representative episode from early on in *Ragged Dick*. When Dick puts himself forward for hire as a guide for a rich boy who is visiting the city, the boy's businessman uncle hesitates to entrust his nephew to him. After a moment's reflection the older man decides to take the risk: "He isn't exactly the sort of





guide I would have picked out for you," the man says. "Still, he looks honest. He has an open face, and I think he can be depended upon" (55). The man's quick physiognomic assessment of Dick is amply borne out by the rest of the story: the ragged boy is not only honest, open, and dependable; his contact with Frank (the rich boy) is decisive in his transformation from "street pigeon" to young gentleman. It is Ragged Dick's looks that initially allay the older man's anxieties about him; on the rich boy's side, young Frank does some seducing of his own.

Amidst the plethora of advice and encouragement Dick receives from Frank and his uncle in the course of the single day of their acquaintance, it is possible to overlook the significance that direct physical contact has in Frank's ability to convince Dick that he is capable of "rising." The first instance of this occurs when Dick lapses for a short time from his usual jocular tone to tell Frank about his occasional "blue spells" over the hard and lonely life he lives on the street. Frank replies, "'Don't say you have no one to care for you, Dick,' . . . lightly laying his hand on Dick's shoulder. 'I will care for you'" (99). There is another laying on of hands by Frank

when the two boys part and Frank persuades Dick to give up his unthrifty (and, by Frank's lights, immoral) street-boy amusements: "'You won't gamble any more, — will you, Dick?' said Frank, laying his hand persuasively on his companion's shoulder" (110). "A feeling of loneliness" is said to overwhelm Dick after Frank leaves the city, as a result of the "strong attachment" he has rapidly formed for the rich boy, but this feeling of loneliness soon gives way to Dick's overriding desire to be fully "gentle" (genteel), rather than merely Frank's "gentle" (sweet, fond, affectionate) ragamuffin.

A modest suit of new clothes is almost always the symbolic gift that enables the Alger hero to begin rising (Dick's is a "hand-me-down" from Frank), just as the gift of a pocket watch is often ritually made at a later point in his ascent. It is as a part of the ritual of donning his first suit that the matter of the boy's still mixed nature frequently arises for a second time: "He now looked quite handsome," the narrator says of Dick when he has put on Frank's gift, "and might readily have been taken for a young gentleman, except that his hands were red and grimy" (58). Alger's hero's face can simply be washed clean, and most of his body encased in suit and shoes, but his hands are the last part of his person to be divested of signs of hard toil and "dangerous" living.

A particularly interesting example of the mixed Alger hero is Tattered Tom, hero of a book of that title (1871) that inaugurated the Tattered Tom series, which soon followed the successful Ragged Dick series. The appropriately named Tom, a girl who has taken to living on the streets disguised as a boy, is the only "girl hero" in all of Alger's books for boys. She competes on an equal basis with other boys selling newspapers and carrying heavy luggage for nickels.

Although the narrator makes passing gestures toward women's rights ("There seemed a popular sentiment in favor of employing boys, and Tom, like others of her sex, found herself shut out from an employment for which she considered herself fitted"; 71), the book, far from being a feminist fable, thoroughly endorses the privileging of the figure of the attractive boy that impels all of Alger's books. Of all of his heroes, only Tom does not "rise" as a consequence of her demonstrably enterprising and honest behavior; she is finally rescued from her plight on the street and restored to her mother, a rich Philadelphia lady from whom she had been abducted years earlier, whereupon she resumes her long-lost genteel, feminine identity as "Jane Lindsay."

Alongside this conventional story of a tomboy who attempts to live as a street boy but is rescued and reclaimed for genteel femininity it is possible to perceive a highly unconventional story of a partially feminized street boy who is drawn upward into genteel femininity

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by the irresistible magnetic force of Alger's model. This tale represents a twist on the standard one because its hero ends up becoming entirely feminine, instead of the mixed composite of putatively masculine and feminine qualities that Alger's heroes usually represent. *Tattered Tom* can be read not as a story of a literal sex change but of the "rise" from the street to the parlor usual in Alger combined with an unusually complete reversal of gender roles from street boy to young lady.

While it might be difficult to support such a reading of *Tattered Tom* on the basis of that text alone, it is possible to do so by interpreting the tale in the context of the series it follows (the Ragged Dick series, and the first three volumes of the Luck and Pluck series) and the one it introduces and to which it gives its name.

One of the characteristics of a proliferating multiple series like Alger's street-boy stories is that repetitions and variations in the writing from volume to volume can produce meanings that are not readily available to the reader of any single volume in the series. The unique degree to which *Tattered Tom* in its course completely refigures Alger's typical boy hero as a genteel young lady provides a good example of the way formulaic and apparently tautological and repetitious writing like that in Alger's serials can generate unexpected meanings. By inaugurating a major series of boys' books with the story of a "female street boy" and by frequently employing gender-related formulae from the other stories of the series with the gender-signifier reversed, *Tattered Tom* represents a point in Alger's writing where the dynamic interactions of the relative age, gender, and class positions of child and adult characters are revealed with particular clarity.

When, for example, the narrator says that Tattered Tom's face is dirty but that if it were clean, "Tom would certainly have been considered pretty" (go), his use of the normative feminine-gender term *pretty* recalls at the same time that it momentarily reverses other descriptions of the boy heroes of the previous tales in the series who have been said to have dirty but *handsome* faces.

Similarly, when the narrator says of the benevolent gentleman who takes an interest in Tattered Tom, "There was something in this strange creature — half boy in appearance — that excited his interest and curiosity" (42-43), the text exhibits with exceptional directness the primary role that ambiguities of age and gender play in

the appeal of Alger's heroes (one thinks of Brace's "half men" / "mere children") to their genteel benefactors.

(To be concluded in November-December)

*Note on illustrations:* The engravings from the NASW edition of Charles Loring Brace's *The Dangerous Classes of New York, and Twenty Years Among Them*, along with the *Tattered Tom* title page, were selected by the editor to accompany this article's appearance in *Newsboy*.

## NOTES

I wish to thank Jane Tompkins and Larzer Ziff for thoughtful readings of an earlier draft of this essay, and Jonathan Goldberg and Michael Warner for helpful advice on subsequent versions of it. I also wish to thank Michael Rogin for making valuable editorial suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York, 1986), 194. I have depended on the chapter of Stansell's book in which this report is quoted ("The Use of the Streets," 193-216) for my brief opening account in this essay of genteel response to street children in New York City in the years just before Alger's arrival on the scene.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 212

<sup>3</sup> Charles Loring Brace, *Short Sermons to News Boys* (1866), 140-41.

<sup>4</sup> Hugh Kenner's phrase occurs in his "The Promised Land," in *A Homemade World: The American Modernist Writers* (New York, 1975), 20. Richard Huber rediscovered the documentary material on Alger's pederasty and discussed it in his book *The American Idea of Success* (New York, 1971).

<sup>5</sup> Michael Zuckerman, "The Nursery Tales of Horatio Alger," *American Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (May 1972): 209.

<sup>6</sup> Horatio Alger, Jr., *Bound to Rise; or, Up the Ladder* (New York, 1909), 101, in a chapter significantly entitled "The Coming of the Magician."

<sup>7</sup> My thinking about homoeroticism, homophobia, social class, and capitalism in this essay is indebted to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York, 1985), especially her chapter "Homophobia, Misogyny, and Capital: The Example of *Our Mutual Friend*," 161-79. I am also indebted to Luce Irigaray, "Commodities Among Themselves," in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, N.Y., 1985), for her analysis of the determinate relation between homophobia and the foundations of patriarchal economics: "Why is masculine homosexuality considered exceptional, then, when in fact the economy as a whole is based upon it?"



homosexuality?" (192). In considering the profound effects of the requirements of the forms of corporate capitalism emergent in Alger's time on his culture, I have also profited from Alan Trachtenberg's treatment of this matter in *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York, 1982).

<sup>8</sup> Alger's sketch of the boy residents of the Newsboys' Lodging House of the Children's Aid Society (Brace's organization) originally appeared in the pages of the *Liberal Christian*. It is reprinted in Gary Scharnhorst with Jack Bales, *The Lost Life of Horatio Alger, Jr.* (Bloomington, Ind., 1985), 79. The appearance at long last of a factually reliable biography of Alger like this one makes writing about his work substantially easier.

<sup>9</sup> I quote this formulation from Scharnhorst, *ibid.*, 67.

<sup>10</sup> The boys involved were apparently all members of Alger's Unitarian congregation in the small Cape Cod community of Brewster. If Alger did cross class lines "for sex" in his later years in New York, where, according to Scharnhorst, he entertained hundreds of street-boy friends in his rooms (*Lost Life*, 77) and semi-officially adopted three of them (124-25), it was of course only the official version of the morality of his time and place that he was violating: the casual sexual exploitation of the poor by those economically and socially "better off" than they was of course a pervasive feature of nineteenth-century urban life. For the example of New York City in the decade before the Civil War, see Christine Stansell, "Women on the Town: Sexual Exchange and Prostitution," in *City of Women*, 171-92.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Nina Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1984), 210-11.

<sup>12</sup> Stansell gives a brief and useful history of the "sketch of scenes, especially street scenes, of urban poverty in New York in the three decades before the civil War in *City of Women*, 195-97, demonstrating as she does so how much what genteel observers of the time "saw" depended on expectations that writing about "the problem" had helped form. Stansell writes, "Although the *problems* of the streets—the fights, the crowds, the crime, the children—were nothing new, the 'problem' itself represented altered bourgeois perception and a broadened political initiative." She goes on to say, "Matsell's report and the writing Brace undertook in the 1850s distilled the particular way the genteel had designated themselves arbiters of the city's everyday life" (197). Louis Chevalier, *Laboring Classes and Dangerous Classes in Paris During the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Frank Jellinek (New York, 1973), gives extensive documentation of the interdependence of the depictions of the urban poor to be found in Sue, Balzac, and Hugo with contemporary forensic writing. D. A. Miller has analyzed similar interdependences between contemporary "policing" techniques and the fiction of Wilkie Collins, Dickens, and Trollope in such articles as "From Roman

*policier to Roman-police: Wilkie Collins's The Moonstone*," *Novel* 13 (Winter 1980): 153-70; "The Novel and the Police," *Glyph* 8 (1981): 127-47; "Discipline in Different Voices: Bureaucracy, Police, Family, and *Bleak House*," *Representations* 1 (February 1983): 59-89; and "The Novel as Usual: Trollope's *Barchester Towers*," in Ruth Bernard Yeazell, ed., *Sex, Politics, and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Novel*, Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1983-84 (Baltimore, 1986), 1-38. Mark Seltzer has explored the relation of the forensic discourse of surveillance to Henry James's writing in "The Princess Casamassima: Realism and the Fantasy of Surveillance," in Eric J. Sundquist, ed., *American Realism: New Essays* (Baltimore, 1982), 95-118.

<sup>13</sup> M.A. Fregier's influential 1840 study *Des Classes dangereuses de la population dans les grandes villes* has been called "a close study of the process by which the course of the lower-class child's life was shaped toward crime" by Louis Chevalier, *Laboring Classes*, 120.

<sup>14</sup> John G. Cawelti traces the lines of descent of this "democratic" boy hero in his chapter on Alger in *Apostles of the Self-Made Man: Changing Concepts of Success in America* (Chicago, 1965). See also in the same volume, "Natural Aristocracy and the New Republic: The Idea of Mobility in the Thought of Franklin and Jefferson," 1-36.

<sup>15</sup> For comparative purposes, see the discussions of the shifting parameters of gentility in nineteenth-century England in the respective introductory chapters of the following two works: Robin Gilmour, *The Idea of the Gentleman in the English Novel* (London, 1981), 1-15; and Shirley Robin Letwin, *The Gentleman in Trollope: Individuality and Moral Conduct* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), 3-21.

<sup>16</sup> All these senses of the term, and all these potential occasions of social unease ranging from simple embarrassment to disgrace and persecution, are alive in American Renaissance writing about the "gentle" and "gentlemen." The figure of the "gentle boy" reached an apogee of sorts in Hawthorne's 1832 tale of that name. A second key text for this figure as it appears in American Renaissance writing is Thoreau's poem, "Lately, alas, I knew a gentle boy....," which he published in the "Wednesday" section of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849).

<sup>17</sup> See Chevalier, *Laboring Classes*, 414.

<sup>18</sup> References to Alger's novels will be given by short titles in the text. The editions cited are: *Ragged Dick* (New York, 1962); *Fame and Fortune* (Boston, 1868); *Phil the Fiddler*, in *Struggling Upwards and Other Works* (New York, 1945); *Jed the Poorhouse Boy*, in *Struggling Upwards*; *Tattered Tom* (Boston, 1871); *Mark the Match Boy* (New York, 1962); *Risen from the Ranks* (Boston, 1874); *Sam's Chance*, and *How He Improved It* (Chicago, n.d.); *Paul the Peddler: The Fortunes of a Young Street Merchant* (New York, n.d.); *Bound to Rise; or, Up the Ladder* (New York, 1909).

## Editor's notebook

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during Alger's brief pastorate in Brewster, Mass., which he resigned in March 1866. He quietly left, and eventually moved to New York. Please note that there were no indictments, trials or prosecution of Alger. He was allowed to resign and move on. Alger scholars have studied the Brewster affair for decades, and most agree that something of an immoral nature occurred involving Alger and two boys. Most of these scholars also agree that this incident, unacceptable as it was, should not negate the widespread influence on an emerging American society that Alger had through his many books.

Entire generations were taught by his stories that hard work and perseverance has its rewards. The titles of Alger's books, with *Strive and Succeed*, *Struggling Upward*, *Making his Mark*, *Luck and Pluck* and *Risen from the Ranks* but a handful of examples, set a tone of self-sufficiency for generations of young Americans.

Horatio Alger has been dead for more than a century. He's not here to defend himself against the do-gooders of Marlborough and others who wish to drag his name through the mud. To turn one of today's most popular phrases into the past tense, "he was what he was." Horatio Alger's contributions to society should far outweigh the negative image from events occurring way back in the early 1860s at a church on Cape Cod.

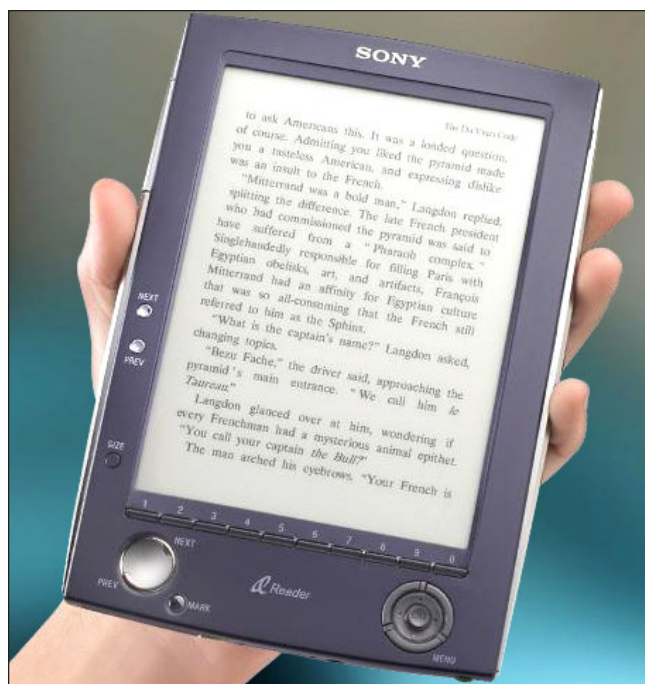
**A new way to read a book:** The arrival of computerized e-Books has had a spotted history. First, all the billions of books created by mankind in the past 500 or so years haven't been digitized — yet. Second, how many readers want to stare at a computer screen and read a book? Not many, apparently. In 2003, Barnes & Noble closed down its e-Book store because of lack of interest. Palm also sold off its e-Book business to a Web site that few care about today.

Sony says it has the answer. It's called the Sony Reader. It retails for \$350 (with a future price drop likely if it catches on), and you can hold it in your hand like a regular book. It has a screen, not back-lit like a computer screen, but one which is read by ambient light — in other words, by that old standby, the bedside lamp.

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Time will tell. Sony believes it will succeed because you hold this 5-by-7-inch "slab" just like a book, turning pages at the touch of a button. When you get drowsy and want to stop for the night, another button electronically "dog-ears" the page where you stopped reading.

The screen looks like a real printed page, not bright white but light gray. The letters are right on the surface, with millions of tiny liquid-filled spheres sandwiched



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between two layers of thin plastic. Depending on how the electrical charge sends its signal to the print layer, the spheres are arranged as black-and-white, replicating the printed page of a book. The size of the letters is adjustable to assist us older folks, and it's not at all like looking at a fuzzy computer screen and its resultant eyestrain.

The key, of course, will be an eventual drop in price to the \$100 level, making this device affordable to the masses. Also, will there be enough "software" (e-texts) out there to feed this thing?

The Sony Reader uses a rechargeable battery, one that reportedly will last through 7,500 page-turns between charges. That's because the reader only draws electric current when you push the page-turn button. During the time you are reading a page, no electricity is drawn from the battery.

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If you buy one, let me know what you think.