

## The Victorian Freak Show

In 1847, during the great age of the freak show, the British periodical *Punch* bemoaned the public's "prevailing taste for deformity." This vividly detailed work argues that far from being purely exploitative, displays of anomalous bodies served a deeper social purpose as they generated popular and scientific debates over the meanings attached to bodily difference. Nadja Durbach examines freaks both well-known and obscure including the Elephant Man; "Lalloo, the Double-Bodied Hindoo Boy," a set of conjoined twins advertised as half male, half female; Krao, a seven-year-old hairy Laotian girl who was marketed as Darwin's "missing link"; the "Last of the Mysterious Aztecs" and African "Cannibal Kings," who were often merely Irishmen in blackface. Upending our tendency to read late twentieth-century conceptions of disability onto the bodies of freak show performers, Durbach shows that these spectacles helped to articulate the cultural meanings invested in otherness--and thus clarified what it meant to be British—at a key moment in the making of modern and imperial ideologies and identities.

While "freaks" have captivated our imagination since well before the nineteenth century, the Victorians flocked to shows featuring dancing dwarves, bearded ladies, "missing links," and six-legged sheep. Indeed, this period has been described by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson as the epoch of "consolidation" for freakery: an era of social change, enormously popular freak shows, and taxonomic frenzy. *Victorian Freaks: The Social Context of Freakery in Britain*, edited by Marlene Tromp, turns to that rich nexus, examining the struggle over definitions of "freakery" and the unstable and sometimes conflicting ways in which freakery was understood and deployed. As the first study centralizing

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British culture, this collection discusses figures as varied as Joseph Merrick, "The Elephant Man"; Daniel Lambert, "King of the Fat Men"; Julia Pastrana, "The Bear Woman"; and Laloo "The Marvellous Indian Boy" and his embedded, parasitic twin. The Victorian Freaks contributors examine Victorian culture through the lens of freakery, reading the production of the freak against the landscape of capitalist consumption, the medical community, and the politics of empire, sexuality, and art. Collectively, these essays ask how freakery engaged with notions of normalcy and with its Victorian cultural context.

In this stunning work of historical fiction, the Booker Prize–nominated author of Jamrach's Menagerie reimagines the incredible true story of Julia Pastrana, a woman branded a freak at birth. Although she was pronounced by the most eminent physician of the day to be "a true hybrid wherein the nature of woman presides over that of the brute," Julia was fluent in English, French, and Spanish, and an accomplished musician with an exquisite singing voice. Alternately vilified and celebrated, all she wanted was for people to see beyond her hairy visage—and perhaps, the chance for love. When Julia meets a charming showman who catapults her onto the global stage, she believes that she has found true happiness at last. But the question of whether her lover truly cares for her—or if his management is just a new form of exploitation—lingers heavily. A deeply moving novel, in *Orphans of the Carnival* Carol Birch has crafted a haunting examination of how we define ourselves and, ultimately, of what it means to be human.

"Suppose that everything we think we know about the Victorians is wrong." So begins *Inventing the Victorians* by Matthew Sweet, a compact and mind-bending whirlwind tour through the soul of the nineteenth century, and a round debunking of our assumptions about it. The Victorians have

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been victims of the "the enormous condescension of posterity," in the historian E. P. Thompson's phrase. Locked in the drawing room, theirs was an age when, supposedly, existence was stultifying, dank, and over-furnished, and when behavior conformed so rigorously to proprieties that the repressed results put Freud into business. We think we have the Victorians pegged--as self-righteous, imperialist, racist, materialist, hypocritical and, worst of all, earnest. Oh how wrong we are, argues Matthew Sweet in this highly entertaining, provocative, and illuminating look at our great, and great-great, grandparents. One hundred years after Queen Victoria's death, Sweet forces us to think again about her century, entombed in our minds by Dickens, the Elephant Man, Sweeney Todd, and by images of unfettered capitalism and grinding poverty. Sweet believes not only that we're wrong about the Victorians but profoundly indebted to them. In ways we have been slow to acknowledge, their age and our own remain closely intertwined. The Victorians invented the theme park, the shopping mall, the movies, the penny arcade, the roller coaster, the crime novel, and the sensational newspaper story. Sweet also argues that our twenty-first century smugness about how far we have evolved is misplaced. The Victorians were less racist than we are, less religious, less violent, and less intolerant. Far from being an outcast, Oscar Wilde was a fairly typical Victorian man; the love that dared not speak its name was declared itself fairly openly. In 1868 the first international cricket match was played between an English team and an Australian team composed entirely of aborigines. The Victorians loved sensation, novelty, scandal, weekend getaways, and the latest conveniences (by 1869, there were image-capable telegraphs; in 1873 a store had a machine that dispensed milk to after-hours' shoppers). Does all this sound familiar? As Sweet proves in this fascinating, eye-opening book, the

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reflection we find in the mirror of the nineteenth century is our own. We inhabit buildings built by the Victorians; some of us use their sewer system and ride on the railways they built. We dismiss them because they are the age against whom we have defined our own. In brilliant style, *Inventing the Victorians* shows how much we have been missing.

A total teaching package for junior high general music classes that traces the history of American popular music. The material accommodates any course from six weeks to a full semester.

A staple of American popular culture during the 19th and early 20th centuries, the freak show seemed to vanish after World War II. This book reveals the image of the freak show, with its combination of the grotesque, horrific and amusing specimens.

This collection offers cultural historical analyses of enfreakment and freak shows, examining the social construction and spectacular display of wondrous, monstrous, or curious Otherness in the formerly relatively neglected region of Continental Europe. Forgotten stories are uncovered about freak-show celebrities, medical specimen, and philosophical fantasies presenting the anatomically unusual in a wide range of sites, including curiosity cabinets, anatomical museums, and traveling circus acts. The essays explore the locally specific dimensions of the exhibition of extraordinary bodies within their particular historical, cultural and political context. Thus the impact of the Nazi eugenics programs, state Socialism, or the Chernobyl catastrophe is observed closely and yet the transnational dimensions of enfreakment are made obvious through topics ranging from Jesuit missionaries' diabolization of American Indians, to translations of Continental European teratology in British medical journals, and the Hollywood silver screen's colonization of European fantasies about deformity. Although

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Continental European freaks are introduced as products of ideologically-infiltrated representations, they also emerge as embodied subjects endowed with their own voice, view, and subversive agency.

This cultural history of the travelling freak show in America chronicles the rise and fall of the industry as attitudes about disability evolved. From 1840 until 1940, hundreds of freak shows crisscrossed the United States, from the smallest towns to the largest cities, exhibiting their casts of dwarfs, giants, Siamese twins, bearded ladies, savages, snake charmers, fire eaters, and other oddities. By today's standards such displays would be considered cruel and exploitative—the pornography of disability. Yet for one hundred years the freak show was widely accepted as one of America's most popular forms of entertainment. Robert Bogdan's fascinating social history brings to life the world of the freak show and explores the culture that nurtured and, later, abandoned it. In uncovering this neglected chapter of show business, he describes in detail the flimflam artistry behind the shows, the promoters and the audiences, and the gradual evolution of public opinion from awe to embarrassment. Freaks were not born, Bogdan reveals; they were manufactured by the amusement world, usually with the active participation of the freaks themselves. Many of the "human curiosities" found fame and fortune, until the ascent of professional medicine transformed them from marvels into pathological specimens.

A fascinating look into the history of the American sideshow and its performers. Learn what's real, what's fake, and what's just downright bizarre. You've probably heard of Tom Thumb. The Elephant Man. Perhaps even Chang and Eng, the original Siamese twins. But what about Eli Bowen, the legless acrobat? Or Prince Randian, the human torso? These were just a few of the many stars that shone during the heyday of

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the American sideshow, from 1840 to 1950. American Sideshow chronicles the lives of truly amazing performers, examining these brave and extraordinary curiosities not just as sideshow performers but as people, delving into the lives they led and the ways they were able to triumph over and even benefit from their abnormalities. American Sideshow discusses the rise and fall of the original sideshows and their subsequent replacement by today's self-made freaks. With the progress of modern medicine, technological advancements, and the wonderful world of body modification, abnormalities are being overcome, treated and even prevented: Siamese twins can now be separated, and in addition to this, tongues can be forked, horns surgically implanted, and earlobes removed. There are also, of course, modern-day giants, fire eaters, sword swallowers, glass eaters, human blockheads, and oh, so much more. These fascinating personalities are celebrated through intimate biographies paired with stunning photographs. Approximately two hundred performers from the past one hundred and sixty years are featured, giving readers a comprehensive and sometimes astonishing look into the history of the American sideshow

A noir classic about the era of the sideshow when freaks were the star attraction — respected and revered by other carnival members. Their stories are frankly and tenderly told by an author who lived and worked as a carny.

A groundbreaking anthology that probes the disposition towards the visually different Giants. Midgets. Tribal non-Westerners. The very fat. The very thin. Hermaphrodites. Conjoined twins. The disabled. The very hirsute. In American history, all have shared the platform equally, as freaks, human oddities, their only commonality their assigned role of anomalous other to the gathered throngs. For the price of a ticket, freak shows offered spectators an icon of bodily

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otherness whose difference from them secured their own membership in a common American identity--by comparison ordinary, tractable, normal. Rosemarie Thomson's groundbreaking anthology probes America's disposition toward the visually different. The book's essays fall into four main categories: historical explorations of American freak shows in the era of P.T. Barnum; the articulation of the freak in literary and textual discourses; contemporary relocations of freak shows; and theoretical analyses of freak culture. Essays address such diverse topics as American colonialism and public presentations of natives; laughing gas demonstrations in the 1840's; Shirley Temple and Tom Thumb; Todd Browning's landmark movie *Freaks*; bodybuilders as postmodern freaks; freaks in *Star Trek*; Michael Jackson's identification with the Elephant Man; and the modern talk show as a reconfiguration of the freak show. In her introduction, Thomson traces the freak show from antiquity to the modern period and explores the constitutive, political, and textual properties of such exhibits. *Freakery* is a fresh, insightful exploration of a heretofore neglected aspect of American mass culture.

National Book Award finalist Here is the unforgettable story of the Binewskis, a circus-geek family whose matriarch and patriarch have bred their own exhibit of human oddities (with the help of amphetamine, arsenic, and radioisotopes). Their offspring include Arturo the Aquaboy, who has flippers for limbs and a megalomaniac ambition worthy of Genghis Khan . . . Iphy and Elly, the lissome Siamese twins . . . albino hunchback Oly, and the outwardly normal Chick, whose mysterious gifts make him the family's most precious—and dangerous—asset. As the Binewskis take their act across the backwaters of the U.S., inspiring fanatical devotion and murderous revulsion; as its members conduct their own Machiavellian version of sibling rivalry, *Geek Love* throws its

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sulfurous light on our notions of the freakish and the normal, the beautiful and the ugly, the holy and the obscene. Family values will never be the same.

Due to horrible physical deformities, he spent much of his life as a fair-ground freak. He was hounded, persecuted, and starving, until his fortune changed and he was rescued, housed, and fed by the distinguished surgeon, Frederick Treves. The subject of several books, a Broadway hit, and a film, Joseph Merrick has become part of popular mythology.

Here, in this fully revised edition containing much fresh information, are the true and unromanticized facts of his life.

The past he wants to forget... Nearly two decades ago, mercenary Marcus Saint left home and never looked back.

But when Saint's mentor is murdered, he does the unthinkable and returns to the place he swore he'd left forever. Saint won't rest until he gets justice for his friend.

What he didn't plan for was the undeniable attraction to his mentor's daughter. The tragedy that brings him back...

Between coping with the loss of her father and keeping his charity afloat, Darla Daniels is being pushed to the edge. And when Marcus Saint comes back, she's pushed over.

Darla believes Saint when he promises to find her father's killer and finds passion and comfort in his arms that she'd never dreamed of. Darla tells herself to stay distant, knows that Saint won't let her in, but every moment with him only makes her feelings deeper.

The woman who makes him want to stay... Saint knows he's playing with fire. He can never be the man Darla deserves, and he knows he'll eventually hurt her.

But with a killer lurking far closer than he'd thought, Darla's heart might not be the only thing at risk... Military Romance, Romantic Suspense, BBW, BWWM

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throughout much of the nineteenth century, and souvenir portraits of performing freaks even found their way into Victorian family albums. At the same time, the imagery and practices of the freak show shocked Victorian sensibilities and sparked controversy about both the boundaries of physical normalcy and morality in entertainment. Marketing tactics for the freak show often made use of common ideological assumptions - compulsory female domesticity and British imperial authority, for instance - but reflected these ideas with the surreal distortion of a fun-house mirror. Not surprisingly, the popular fiction written for middle-class Victorian readers also calls upon imagery of extreme physical difference, and the odd-bodied characters that people nineteenth-century fiction raise meaningful questions about the relationships between physical difference and the social expectations that shaped Victorian life." "This book is primarily an aesthetic analysis of freak show imagery as it appears in Victorian popular fiction, including the works of Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, Guy de Maupassant, Florence Marryat, and Lewis Carroll. It argues that, in spite of a strong nineteenth-century impulse to define and defend normalcy, images of radical physical difference are often framed in surprisingly positive ways in Victorian fiction. The dwarves, fat people, and bearded ladies who intrude on the more conventional imagery of Victorian novels serve to shift the meaning of those works' main plots and characters, sometimes sharpening satires of the nineteenth-century treatment of the poor or disabled, sometimes offering new traits and behaviors as supplements for restrictive social norms." --Book Jacket.

When Toby flees a brutal workhouse at Christmas to join a magical circus, he thinks he'll live happily ever after. Then children start disappearing from the streets of Victorian London. Will he stop the kidnapper or become the next victim?

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This 1982 book draws on primary sources to illuminate the life and achievements of engineer Charles Blacker Vignoles (1793-1875).

'A promising young historian with a taste for the exotic.' Stephen Fry *The Wonders* is a radical new history of the Victorian age: meet the forgotten and extraordinary freak performers whose talents and disabilities helped define an era. On 23 March, 1844, General Tom Thumb, at 25 inches tall, entered the Picture Gallery at Buckingham Palace and bowed low to Queen Victoria. On both sides of the Atlantic, this meeting marked a tipping point in the nineteenth century - the age of the freak was born. Bewitching all levels of society, it was a world of astonishing spectacle - of dwarfs, giants, bearded ladies, Siamese twins and swaggering showmen - and one that has since inspired countless novels, films and musicals. But the real stories (human dramas that so often eclipsed the fantasy presented on the stage), of the performing men, women and children, have been forgotten or marginalized in the histories of the very people who exploited them. In this richly evocative account, Dr John Woolf uses a wealth of recently discovered material to bring to life the sometimes tragic, sometimes triumphant, always extraordinary stories of people who used their (dis)abilities and difference to become some of the first international celebrities. And through their lives we discover afresh some of the great

transformations of the age: the birth of showbusiness, of celebrity, of advertising, of 'alternative facts'; while also exploring the tensions between the power of fame, the impact of exploitation and our fascination with 'otherness'. In a dusty corner at the Institute of Forensic Medicine in Norway lie the remains of Julia Pastrana, half hidden in a black plastic sack, all but forgotten. Yet in the middle of the nineteenth century, this 'ape woman' was renowned, visited by scientists of international repute, and drawing the populace of three continents to the freakshows in which she starred. Just 4ft 6in tall, she was covered in hair, with a protruding jaw; but she also spoke several languages, married, had a child, made money. This is the compelling and strange story of how a woman born in the backwoods of Mexico came to be one of the most infamous women in Europe and America and how, nearly 150 years after she first set foot upon the stage, Julia is still being shown to others. The exhibition goes on.

From Lentini the three-legged man and Siamese twins to equipment caravans and big top architects, this captivating collection lifts the striped curtain to reveal the larger-than-life world of circuses, carnivals, and freak shows in post-World War II America. Copious never-before-seen photographs, in-depth historical research, and insightful interviews with former sideshow employees illustrate the

development of the circus sideshow, the roles of key groups—the freaks, working acts, managers, talkers—and the importance of the grift.

My doctoral dissertation, "'Freaking' the Archive: Archiving Possibilities with the Victorian Freak Show," proposes an archival research practice grounded in the nineteenth-century freak show's peculiar conventions. Freak bodies are perplexing and material: hairy, leggy, squishy, rubbery, even electric. Freak bodies are also perplexing materials: forged autobiographies, grangerized travelogues, reported gossip. Through their taxonomizing imperatives, archives subdue these difficult bodies, but also risk stifling their lively histories. My "freak" archival research practice confronts this problem by generating new methods for accessing subjects underrepresented in the historical record through traditional research models. Anchored in case studies of Victorian freak performers and their contemporary performance art progeny, "'Freaking' the Archive" splits into three sections titled "The Archive," "Archives," and "Archiving," which progress from broadly theoretical to increasingly practice based. I contend that freaks overhaul the normative orders of archival systems by breeding forms of documentation that simultaneously activate the freak show's interlocking textual, visual, aural, and performed narratives, requiring us to push beyond our inherited visual-empirical research methods.

Broadening the archive's communicative capacities changes the goals of archival research. No longer concentrated on assembling stable bodies of knowledge, archival work becomes an experiment in provisionality committed to imagining more inclusive research practices.

Living in a time when it was scandalous even to show a bit of ankle, a small number of courageous women covered their bodies in tattoos and traveled the country, performing nearly nude on carnival stages. These gutsy women spun amazing stories for captivated audiences about abductions and forced tattooing at the hands of savages, but little has been shared of their real lives. Though they spawned a cultural movement—almost a quarter of Americans now have tattoos—these women have largely faded into history. *The Tattooed Lady* uncovers the true stories behind these women, bringing them out of the sideshow realm and into their working class realities. Combining thorough research with more than a hundred historical photos, this updated second edition explores tattoo origins, women's history, circus lore, and includes even more personal and professional details from modern tattooed ladies. A fascinating read, *The Tattooed Lady* pays tribute to a group of unique and amazing women whose legacy lives on.

"Joe Nickell - once a carnival pitchman, then a magician, private detective, and investigative writer -

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has pursued sideshow secrets for years and has worked the famous carnival midway at the Canadian National Exhibition. For this book, he interviewed showmen and performers, collected carnival memorabilia, researched published accounts of sideshows and their lore, and even performed some classic sideshow feats, such as eating fire and lying on a bed of nails as a cinderblock was broken on his chest. The result of these varied efforts, *Secrets of the Sideshows* tells the captivating story of the magic, tricks - real or illusory - and performers of the world's midway shows."--BOOK JACKET.

Society has long been fascinated with the freakish, shocking and strange. In this book Gary Cross shows how freakish elements have been embedded in modern popular culture over the course of the 20th century despite the evident disenchantment with this once widespread cultural outlet. Exploring how the spectacle of freakishness conflicted with genteel culture, he shows how the condemnation of the freak show by middle-class America led to a transformation and merging of genteel and freak culture through the cute, the camp and the creepy. Though the carnival and circus freak was marginalised by the 1960s and had largely disappeared by the 1980s, forms of freakish culture survived and today appear in reality TV, horror movies, dark comedies and the popularity of tattoos. *Freak Show Legacies* will focus less on the

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individual 'freak' as 'the other' in society, and more on the audience for the freakish and the transformation of wonder, sensibility and sensitivity that this phenomenon entailed. It will use the phenomenon of 'the freak' to understand the transformation of American popular culture across the 20th century, identify elements of 'the freak' in popular culture both past and present, and ask how it has prevailed despite its apparent unpopularity. Traces the efforts of Bob Langmuir to authenticate photographs he discovered in the Hubert's Museum archives that he believed to be prints by a legendary photographer.

The Freaks are a lonely band of misfits, trapped in a Victorian sideshow known as Plumpscuttle's Peculiar. There's Sheba, a kind-hearted wolf-girl with an amazing sense of smell; Sister Moon, an ex-assassin; and Monkey Boy, hygienically challenged but nimble and quick-witted. Together they are a force to be reckoned with. In a world of thieves, grave-robbers and child-snatchers, the Freaks decide to put their extraordinary talents to use-to solve the mysteries that no-one else cares about. Join them here in the first of their incredible, freaktastic adventures!

This book traces how the American freak show has re-emerged in new visual forms in the 21st century. It explores the ways in which moving image media transmits and contextualizes, reinterprets and appropriates, the freak show model into a "new American freak show." It investigates how new freak

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representations introduce narratives about sex, gender, and cultural perceptions of people with disabilities. The chapters examine such representations found in horror films, including a prolonged look at *Freaks* (1932) and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), documentaries such as *Murderball* (2005) and TLC's *Push Girls* (2012-2013), disability pornography including the pornographic documentary *Sick: The Life and Death of Bob Flanagan Supermasochist* (1997), and the music icons Marilyn Manson and Lady Gaga in their portrayals of disability and freakishness. Through this book we learn that the visual culture that has emerged takes the place of the traditional freak show but opens new channels of interpretation and identification through its use of mediated images as well as the altered freak-norm relationship that it has fostered. In its illumination of the relationship between normal and freakish bodies through different media, this book will appeal to students and academics interested in disability studies, gender studies, film theory, critical race theory, and cultural studies.

A radical new history that rediscovers the remarkable freak performers whose talents and charisma helped define an era. On March 23, 1844, General Tom Thumb, just 25 inches tall, entered the Picture Gallery at Buckingham Palace and bowed low to Queen Victoria. On both sides of the Atlantic, this meeting marked a tipping point in the nineteenth century, and the age of the freak was born. Bewitching all levels of society, it was a world of curiosities and astonishing spectacle—of dwarfs, giants, bearded ladies, Siamese twins, and swaggering

showmen. But the real stories—human dramas that so often eclipsed the fantasy presented on the stage—of the performing men, women and children, have been forgotten or marginalized in the histories of the very people who exploited them. In this richly evocative account, John Woolf uses a wealth of recently discovered material to bring to life the sometimes tragic, sometimes triumphant, always extraordinary stories of people who used their (dis)abilities and difference to become some of the first international celebrities. Through their lives we discover afresh some of the great transformations of the age: the birth of show business, of celebrity, of advertising, and of “alternative facts” while also exploring the tensions between the power of fame, the impact of exploitation, and our fascination with “otherness.”

Winner of the Henry-Russell Hitchcock Award, Victorian Society of America (2014) When P. T. Barnum met twenty-five-inch-tall Charles Stratton at a Bridgeport, Connecticut hotel in 1843, one of the most important partnerships in entertainment history was born. With Barnum’s promotional skills and the miniature Stratton’s comedic talents, they charmed a Who’s Who of the 19th century, from Queen Victoria to Charles Dickens to Abraham Lincoln. Adored worldwide as “General Tom Thumb,” Stratton played to sold-out shows for almost forty years. From his days as a precocious child star to his tragic early death, *Becoming Tom Thumb* tells the full story of this iconic figure for the first time. It details his triumphs on the New York stage, his epic celebrity wedding, and his around-the-world tour, drawing on

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newly available primary sources and interviews. From the mansions of Paris to the deserts of Australia, Stratton's unique brand of Yankee comedy not only earned him the accolades of millions of fans, it helped move little people out of the side show and into the lime light.

A thorough survey of the origins and development of the major distinct American commercial entertainments that emerged between over the course of the 19th century and into the 20th, including P.T. Barnum's American Museum, freak show, and circus, as well as blackface minstrelry, Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, and vaudeville.

**NATIONAL BESTSELLER** The true story of two African-American brothers who were kidnapped and displayed as circus freaks, and whose mother endured a 28-year struggle to get them back. The year was 1899 and the place a sweltering tobacco farm in the Jim Crow South town of Truevine, Virginia. George and Willie Muse were two little boys born to a sharecropper family. One day a white man offered them a piece of candy, setting off events that would take them around the world and change their lives forever. Captured into the circus, the Muse brothers performed for royalty at Buckingham Palace and headlined over a dozen sold-out shows at New York's Madison Square Garden. They were global superstars in a pre-broadcast era. But the very root of their success was in the color of their skin and in the outrageous caricatures they were forced to assume: supposed cannibals, sheep-headed freaks, even "Ambassadors from Mars." Back home, their mother

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never accepted that they were "gone" and spent 28 years trying to get them back. Through hundreds of interviews and decades of research, Beth Macy expertly explores a central and difficult question: Where were the brothers better off? On the world stage as stars or in poverty at home? TRUEVINE is a compelling narrative rich in historical detail and rife with implications to race relations today.

Neo-Victorian Freakery explores the way in which contemporary fiction, film, and television has revisited the lives of nineteenth-century freak show performers. It locates the neo-Victorian freak show as a crucial forum for debating the politics of disability, gender, sexuality and race within the genre more broadly.

A bewitching historical gothic tale of obsessive love 'recommended to fans of Sarah Waters' [Heat] from the author of the highly acclaimed TV Book Club-selected THE SOMNAMBULIST. Saved from the Thames one foggy London night, Pearl grows up at the House of Mermaids - a brothel that becomes the closest thing to home. But despite being cosseted and spoiled by the Madame, come her 14th year, Pearl is to be sold to the highest bidder. Orphaned twins Lily and Elijah are on a rare trip to London when they meet the ethereal Pearl. And the repercussions of this chance encounter will bind all their fates together, in a dark and dangerous way. Bewitching, gothic and sensual, this is a tale of love and betrayal in a world where nothing is quite as it seems.

For fans of Erin Morgenstern's The Night Circus, Sara Gruen's Water for Elephants, and Diane Setterfield's Once Upon a River, an atmospheric and spectacular novel in which one woman's life is transformed by the arrival of a Victorian

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circus of wonders. Step up, step up! In 1860s England, circus mania is sweeping the nation. Crowds jostle for a glimpse of the lion-tamers, the dazzling trapeze artists and, most thrilling of all, the so-called “human wonders.” When Jasper Jupiter’s Circus of Wonders pitches its tent in a poor coastal town, the life of one young girl changes forever. Sold to the ringmaster as a “leopard girl” because of the birthmarks that cover her body, Nell is utterly devastated. But as she grows close to the other performers, she finds herself enchanted by the glittering freedom of the circus, and by her own role as the Queen of the Moon and Stars. Before long, Nell’s fame spreads across the world—and with it, a chance for Jasper Jupiter to grow his own name and fortune. But what happens when her fame begins to eclipse his own, when even Jasper’s loyal brother Toby becomes captivated by Nell? No longer the quiet flower-picker, Nell knows her own place in the world, and she will fight for it. A gorgeously wrought exploration of celebrity, power, and belonging, this is a historical novel unlike any other, with an unforgettable heroine at its heart.

This conflict informs us not only of the complicated role that the circus played in Victorian society but provides a unique view into a collective psyche fraught by contradiction and anxiety.

Cast out by Victorian society, Eve and Abel find succour from an unlikely source. They soar to fame as the Lion Faced Girl and the Flayed Man, star performers in Professor Josiah Arroner’s Palace of Curiosities. And there begins a journey that will entwine their fates forever.

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