

Ella Crabtree
Professor Chakkalalal

Surdna Fellowship: End of Summer Report

My goal for this summer was to examine and interpret the role of children in American literature, with guidance from Professor Chakkalalal. I wanted to discover how the storylines of child characters elucidate the cruelty and impracticality of particular policies. To begin this endeavor, I read novels by Harriet Beecher Stowe: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), *Dred: Tale of the Dismal Swamp* (1856) and *The Minister's Wooing* (1859). In each of these novels, I noticed that interracial attachments— particularly attachments between enslaved caregivers and white children— are common. Because I am deeply interested in attachment, and had already completed a Psychology independent study on it with Professor Putnam in the past, I chose to examine these attachments more deeply. Through continued research, I found that consistently, enslaved characters' selflessness and faith manifest in exemplary attachments to white children, while slave-holding parents are comparatively ineffectual. Through juxtaposition of these attachments, Stowe suggests that slavery created a crisis of parenthood: black caregivers are forced to perform motherhood in the place of white mothers, often at the expense of their own children.

With Professor Chakkalalal's direction and support, I narrowed my scope from examining the broad roles of children in American literature, and chose to continue examining interracial attachment more specifically. I turned next to Toni Morrison, another American author with a strong and consistent focus on interracial attachment. Though her novels take place more than 100 years after Stowe's, they reinforce the idea that interracial attachments often occur at the expense of black children. *The Bluest Eye* (1970), provides the strongest evidence for this phenomenon. I look forward to transforming my work from this summer into an honors project on interracial attachment in American literature. Going forward, I hope to continue to examine Stowe and Morrison's work, as well as investigate present-day implications of interracial attachment.