Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*

Race, Conflict, and Culture

Susan Gillman and
Forrest G. Robinson, editors

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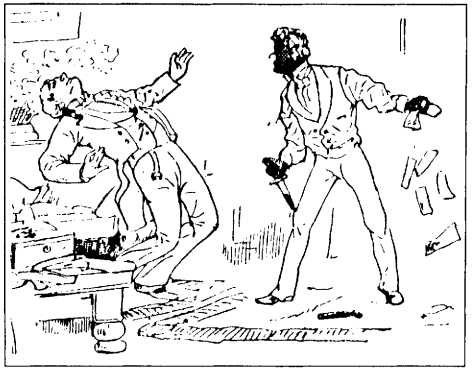

Edited by Susan Gillman and
Forrest G. Robinson

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Durham and London, 1990

Susan Gillman's essay was previously published in the *South Atlantic Quarterly* 87, no. 2 (Spring 1988), © 1988 Duke University Press; a different version appeared as chapter 3 in *Dark Twins: Imposture and Identity in Mark Twain's America*, © 1989, University of Chicago Press. Eric J. Sundquist's essay previously appeared in *Representations* 24 (Fall 1988), © 1988 The Regents of the University of California.

Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper ∞

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Mark Twain's Pudd'nhead Wilson : race, conflict, and culture / edited by Susan Gillman and Forrest G. Robinson.
p. cm.
ISBN 0-8223-1001-5
1. Twain, Mark, 1835-1910. Pudd'nhead Wilson. 2. Twain, Mark, 1835-1910—Political and social views. 3. Identity (Psychology) in literature. 4. Slavery and slaves in literature. 5. Social conflict in literature. 6. Race relations in literature. 7. Doubles in literature. I. Gillman, Susan Kay. II. Robinson, Forrest G. (Forrest Glen), 1940-
PS1317.M27 1990
813'.4—dc20 89-49753
CIP

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Introduction

Rumors of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* as an "unreadable" novel were not always greatly exaggerated.[1] What are now regarded as its leading critical features were once dismissed as the signs of its failure: we read the incoherence in Twain's narrative not as aesthetic failure but as political symptom, the irruption into this narrative about mistaken racial identity of materials from the nineteenth-century political unconscious. Instead of searching for a hidden unifying structure, as did a previous generation of New Critics, the scholars in this volume are after what Myra Jehlen calls "the novel's most basic and unacknowledged issues." We do thus share the earlier critical passion for detection, although we are not similarly inclined to dismiss evidence of authorial intention. Most of the essays in this volume are subtextual studies which seize upon the text's inconsistencies and contradictions as windows on the world of late-nineteenth-century American culture. The collection as a whole seeks to make the strata of Mark Twain's political unconscious available for critical scrutiny.

Mark Twain's novel about mistaken identities is manifestly uncertain of its own. The textual history of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* gives evidence that Twain was unsure whether to regard his errant creation as the farce, *Those Extraordinary Twins*, that first took shape in his imagination, or to settle instead for the somber tale that later overtook him. How indeed should we refer to this work, originally published by the American Publishing Company in 1894 as *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson and the Comedy Those Extraordinary Twins*? Most of the essays in this volume use *Pudd'nhead Wilson* to refer to both texts, thus joining the comedy and tragedy together even more closely than they were in the first American edition. For most of us, moreover, Twain's ambivalent relationship to his book points to related ambivalences toward apparently unrelated matters: race misrecognition, slavery, political cross-dressing, aristocratic liber-

ties, democratic freedoms, and narrative coherence, to name a few. Indeed, that final display of ambivalence – expressing itself in Twain's nervously mocking, interstitial interrogations of his "jack-leg" performance – establishes for one of us that there is a discernible "sense" running through the text's apparently hopeless disorder.

It was precisely *Pudd'nhead Wilson*'s reputation for disorder, and the cultural implications of its relative critical neglect, that inspired the interdisciplinary conference, held in March 1987 at the University of California, Santa Cruz, from which this collection of essays emerged. James Cox's keynote address, with its attention to the centrifugal play of the novel's (and the novelist's) chief contradictions, captured the tone of much that followed. In focusing on the competing tendencies in Twain's character – his fascination with the liberating mechanical technology of print and his bondage as an author to preconscious fantasies, his wish to be free from political tyranny along with his consequent sense of the tyrannies of freedom – Cox correlates the ambivalences at work in Twain's autobiography with the cultural contradictions of the Reconstruction era. Similarly, the essays that follow tend to arise from the perception of divisions in the novel's constructions of race, class, and gender, and in Twain's affiliated attitudes toward political economy and theology, governance, and personal identity. Such thematic variety reflects the disciplinary range of the scholars gathered here (their fields: literary criticism, history, political science, anthropology), and the range of the novel itself, whose fragmentedness appeals to a taste for multiplicity, and invites the kind of interdisciplinary practice on display here. We hasten to add that one critic's rich multiplicity is another's hopeless muddle. Thus the volume closes with a direct challenge to the text's value – as literature, aesthetically defined, or as cultural symptom – and therefore to critical enterprises such as this one.

Mark Twain might have been amused by the expense of so much critical energy on his freakish twin creation. Academic humbug, he might have concluded (our own concluding gesture to the contrary notwithstanding). Still, it is presently our conviction that the time is right for a long, careful look at this vexed but powerful novel. The publication in 1980 of Sidney E. Berger's Norton Critical Edition of *Pudd'nhead Wilson and Those Extraordinary Twins* has provided us with a text that will remain "standard" until the California edition appears. (The Norton Critical Edition is used as the citing text throughout this volume.) At the same time, thanks to the painstaking research of Hershel Parker and others, scholars appreciate more

than ever before the so-called "aesthetic anomalies" of the texts and enjoy the opportunity – not exploited by Parker – to make sense of them. Anomalies such as the inconsistently shifting racial characterization of one of the novel's protagonists are evidently geared to the chaotic and confusing sequence – now pretty firmly documented – in which Twain composed and revised the manuscript. This valuable new light on the text's manifestly incomplete aesthetic development forms the occasion, seized upon here, to reformulate the questions conventionally asked of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, especially about the halting emergence of the dark, enigmatic "tragedy" about racial twins from the "comedy" about Siamese twins.

On a broader critical front, increasing attention to the literary text as social production, and a complementary attentiveness to the textualization of such cultural categories as race, class, and gender make the present moment a particularly auspicious one for an interdisciplinary study of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. Methodologically most relevant are efforts to situate literary texts in cultural context, and thus to reread them, both as products of the literary marketplace and as agents of cultural and political transformation. This general scholarly trend has as yet unmeasured implications for *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. But one area of exploration that strikes us as particularly promising is bordered by the treatment of race and sexuality in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*: are racial inequalities hereditary or environmental, and how does the novel trace the illicit relationship, central to its plot, between white males and their black female slaves and offspring? These questions are now being recast in the interdisciplinary context of the New Literary and Social History. Recent scholarship has tended fruitfully to pair, rather than to separate, issues of race and sex, in an attempt to articulate the often paradoxical relationships and divergences between figures for racial and sexual identity and difference. A cultural approach to the construction of racial and sexual categories in Mark Twain's novel enables us better to assess received representations of political and social change in the late nineteenth century.

Because its true subject matter is mistaken identity, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* readily lends itself to the meditations on race, class, and gender brought together in this collection. Such a gathering of these now ultra-fashionable categories will undoubtedly appeal to those with a taste for the "new historicism," a term we employ with the understanding that it refers broadly both to a field of study which foregrounds the issues of race, class, and gender, *and* to the production of an alternative cultural realm in which those issues can be ad-

dressed adequately. Finally, though, in order to give these issues canonical status, a prior project is enjoined upon us: to demonstrate that this neglected, almost proverbially "secondary" and "problem" text in fact merits the kind of sustained attention generally reserved for "classic" works. The canonical elevation of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, clearly if implicitly an agenda for several of the critics represented here, is perhaps most forcefully developed when the novel is viewed as a teaching text equal in value to *Huckleberry Finn*.

In advocating *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, we advance the lesson that so-called "lesser" works are often the most telling ones – politically *and* aesthetically telling. Because the novel is itself problematically open-ended, for example, it raises issues in an open-ended way: issues of history and the uses of history, issues of textual authority and of the authority of the American literary canon, issues of race, class and gender. We may go further in this vein to suggest that the status "lesser" is often the sign that a text presents challenges to dominant ideologies. "Lesser," we may find, means vital, critical, central. Thus we offer *Pudd'nhead Wilson* as a case study in contemporary methods of interpreting texts that defy older critical categories. It is a paradigmatic "new text" in that it teaches us how to teach differently.

Bearing the question of teaching in mind, we have organized the essays so that questions are opened and discussed in what appears to be the most useful sequence. Beginning with the keynote address, which is followed by a close look at the compositional history of the text, the essays move outward from late-nineteenth-century ideologies of race and gender, to the analysis of political economy and theology, governance, and personal identity. We offer the rather detailed summaries that follow as an aid to readers with specific topics in mind.

James M. Cox sets the tone for the volume in his free-wheeling "*Pudd'nhead Wilson* Revisited," a series of meditations on the word *race* – meditations which lead him inexorably, even slavishly, he concedes, to a sense of how culturally and morally overloaded a term it is. Cox draws attention to the contradictory dynamics and inertia of American race relations. "Race," he observes, refers at once to the most vigorous of human activities – the race for the Pacific or the arms race – and to the inertial essence of the human species, the races of the human family. In Cox's view, the absolute contradiction of slavery in a free country, of "race" in America, explodes into the myriad divisions of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, particularly in its opposition between slavery and freedom, an opposition that the novel simultaneously advances and subverts. In recognizing that the first Amer-

ican revolution resulted in freedom from tyranny yet left us with slavery, Mark Twain also saw that the second American revolution brought freedom out of slavery yet left us with the tyranny of freedom, freedom "under the law." In the course of developing his ideas, Cox bears witness to the sense of contradiction that overtook him in his return to a text which he thought he had long since mastered.[2]

Forrest G. Robinson finds in the novel's notable textual confusions a key to what he calls "The Sense of Disorder in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*." Focusing specifically on the discontinuity between the dark central chapters and the "strangely up-beat" conclusion, Robinson argues that the point is precisely the comprehensive blindness of author, book, and reader to the significance of that discontinuity. Rather than confront the full, painful implications of the race-slavery plot, they acquiesce in the tidy solution of the murder mystery. Indeed, the novel's cultural authority lies in this process of evasion, or "bad faith," which enables the retreat to an illusion of resolution where none has occurred. The impulse to address the bitter reality of race-slavery, as it surfaces in the disorderly order of the novel's composition, was evidently in tension with a countering impulse to suppress the same truth. In effect, Robinson concludes, the terms of Twain's truce with bad faith enforced the composition of two stories, one the vehicle of grave cultural analysis, the other a distracting cover. Both stories are "contained" in the published *Pudd'nhead*, forming a pattern of textual doubleness that marks what Robinson sees as a pervasive tendency to acknowledge *and* to deny the tragedy of American race relations.

In his "Mark Twain and Homer Plessy," Eric Sundquist gives historical texture to the explosive doubleness of *Pudd'nhead*, most notably by aligning the trial at the novel's conclusion with the most important civil rights case of its time, *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). There is, Sundquist finds, a common legal justification for racism at work in the two cases. The notion of a citizenship rigidly divided along racial lines, as it was constitutionally authorized in the discriminatory "separate but equal" doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, was at large in a wide variety of social and cultural institutions in the decades before the turn of the century. In its preoccupation with doubling, imitation, and cross-dressing, *Pudd'nhead* is a virtual "allegory" of this dominant trend, not least in its divided sentiments on the sorry spectacle. For if Mark Twain was on one side inclined to subvert the "scientific" category of race, holding it up as a fiction of law and custom, he was also careful to conclude his own fiction with a dramatic reassertion of racial difference. *Pudd'nhead* is thus the

literary analogue to a legal system that contrived to re-enslave blacks even as it declared them free, and to the broader historical and cultural context in which that system was embedded.

Turning from the historical drama of Reconstruction, Michael Rogin ("Francis Galton and Mark Twain: The Natal Autograph in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*") gives his attention to the psychodramatics at play in the novel. He begins by observing that in drawing the tragic *Pudd'nhead* out of the farcical *Those Extraordinary Twins*, Mark Twain resolved the far-fetched legal conundrum posed by the inseparable Siamese twins, but at the same time backed into equations of innocence with white, and guilt with black. Having located the novelist at "the center of the deranged, racialist culture" of his time, Rogin develops his case by turning to three of the deeply divided novel's most prominent oppositions. First, taking the rise of *Pudd'nhead* and fall of Tom as his point of departure, and the project of Francis Galton as a major point of comparison, he elaborates on the evolution of the black male stereotype, from the docile child of the antebellum paternal order to the black beast of post-Reconstruction. Second, he reflects on the struggle between *Pudd'nhead,* the male advocate of a sharply defined color line, and Roxana, the female proponent of its collapse. Finally, he turns to the division within Roxana, between the "natural" mother who bears her son into bondage, and the "masquerading" mother who plays with his identity and thereby sets him free.

Susan Gillman's essay, "'Sure Identifiers': Race, Science, and the Law in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*," is clearly akin to Rogin's in its emphasis on the novel's often inadvertently revealing representation of "the social construction of racial identity" in the late nineteenth century. Gillman highlights the text's strange mingling of historical realism with melodrama, arguing that this freak of form is the offspring of the novelist's competing impulses to present and to deny the grave truth of the ongoing crisis in American race relations. Such mixed intentions can be linked to the reality of miscegenation in Southern slave culture, and to the desperate efforts by the master class to mask the truth of that mixing in fictions of white racial purity. But *Pudd'nhead* is most tellingly a barometer to the vexed question of identity construction and social control as it emerged in the wake of abolition. In the novel's dramatization of racial interchangeability, Gillman argues, and in its more oblique preoccupation with permeable sexual boundaries, we catch sight of the culture's tentative address to some of its leading fictions, and, more broadly, to the uncertain foundations of its social knowledge.

In the subtitle to her essay, "The Ties that Bind," Myra Jehlen indicates that she shares Susan Gillman's concern with both "Race and Sex in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*." She construes her major themes historically as ideological fixtures in Mark Twain's America; and, like Gillman, she locates them textually in the novel's conspicuous failures of form. Jehlen draws specific attention to the strange twist by which the novel transforms the initially innocent and wronged Roxana and Tom into the villains of the story. Such lapses in fictional coherence make historical sense as manifestations of the "anxieties aroused by a racist social structure" in which leading elements of identity construction – black and white, male and female, child and adult – are subject to sharply contradictory definitions. Thus in passing from childhood to adulthood, Tom and Chambers proceed from innocence and racial interchangeability into radically different (but equally familiar) stereotypes of the inherently inferior adult black male. In closely related developments, the heroic Roxy, who subverts the system by insisting upon her son's racial equality, later condemns Tom for his trace of black blood, and is finally cast as a guilty slave who threatens the community with chaos. These are the symptoms, Jehlen concludes, of a "stalemate" between an impulse toward social criticism and the conservative incapacity to imagine significant change.

Carolyn Porter shifts the critical focus from David Wilson's plot, with its attention to white male desire and the repressed guilt of the slaveholders, to "Roxana's Plot," the story of resilient, subversive power in "a real black slave mother." If we are to appreciate the anxiety that Roxy arouses, Porter argues, we must abandon the mystified opposition of the black Mammy and the black Jezebel, turning instead to the repressed middle, the potent figure who takes arms against the oppressive establishment. Porter's Roxana is the source, and not merely the agent, of power. In switching the babies, she brings intelligence, courage, and formidable power into subversive alliance against the white patriarchal slave system. In countenancing this Roxana, Mark Twain opened a place in his narrative for the display of the "deep rifts in [his] society's complex and contradictory ideologies." But he had no sooner released this powerful black mother – who takes control of her world and, increasingly, of her story – than he set in motion the repressive David Wilson plot that finally contains her and restores the village to the *status quo ante*.

John Carlos Rowe's essay, "Fatal Speculations: Murder, Money, and Manners in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*," is the first of several to treat institutional issues of political economy, theology, and governance.

Rowe views Dawson's Landing as a point of intersection between an older America and the bustling, aggressive, materialistic society of the post-Civil War era. Yet Mark Twain's sentimental attachment to the mythic rural idyl should not blind us, Rowe insists, to his emphasis (in *Pudd'nhead* and other works) on the continuities between the plantation system and the helpless bondage of labor in the newer urban economics. As *The Gilded Age* makes clear, Mark Twain was aware and critical of the speculative impulse that arose in America after the Civil War. *Pudd'nhead Wilson* extends this analysis by demonstrating that slavery is "not just a provincial agrarian institution but the basis for the speculative economy that would fuel industrial expansion, Manifest Destiny, and laissez-faire capitalism." The slave-owner is thus a speculator par excellence who thrives if he makes sound investments, develops his property, and accurately anticipates trends in the market. Giving ample attention to Mark Twain's disastrous career as a businessman, Rowe elaborates in detail on the implications of economic life in the novel, with a special eye to Pudd'nhead himself, the leader in the new ways of doing business.

In his "By Right of the White Election: Political Theology and Theological Politics in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*," Michael Cowan attends to the complex interplay between politics and theology in Dawson's Landing. He begins with *Those Extraordinary Twins*, observing that the entire political process is cast into uncertainty by Luigi's election to the Board of Aldermen. Here and elsewhere, the meaning of "election" is profoundly ambiguous. There are ironic variations in meaning, for example, in the term's application to slaves and their masters. Cowan goes on to draw out the social and political implications of the marked contrast between the Arminian cast of white religious doctrine, and the strong antinomian strain in black theology, especially as it is interpreted by Roxana. Racial identity, he notes, is Calvinist to the extent that one drop of black blood can "out-vote" a vast majority of white. Cowan goes on to explore the numerous cognate ironies that surface along the uncertain boundaries between the religious and the secular in this novel of rigid if equally (and ironically) uncertain racial categories.

Politics are even more exclusively the concern of Wilson Carey McWilliams in his essay, "*Pudd'nhead Wilson* on Democratic Governance." Observing that the novel is framed by the Jacksonian era in American mass party politics, and that it may be read as a meditation on the ancient question, "Who should rule?" McWilliams approaches the text with an eye to its bearings on American political history,

and on democratic ideology. His essay unfolds as a linked series of ruminations, gravitating to the politically paradoxical and subversive in *Pudd'nhead*, and prompted by references to such traditional political thinkers as Plato and Aristotle, Dante, Locke, Franklin, and Jefferson. Their aristocratic pretensions notwithstanding, the F.F.V. leaders of Dawson's Landing are in fact "small-town entrepreneurs" whose authority rests on property, not rank. As a woman and a black, Roxy is challenging testimony to major flaws in the Constitution. And it is a popular delusion that freedom and equality are primary American political values. They take second place, as *Pudd'nhead* shows, to the accumulation of private wealth. But to challenge that delusion directly is probably futile and possibly dangerous. Mark Twain knew this, and thus "elected to write in soft disguises," hoping to beguile his readers – where he could not lead them directly – to reform.

George E. Marcus ("What did he reckon would become of the other half if he killed his half?: Doubled, Divided, and Crossed Selves in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*; or, Mark Twain as Cultural Critic in His Own Times and Ours") moves broadly into the question of personal identity – a question explored in the specific terms of race and gender in earlier essays. According to Marcus, the half-a-dog joke that makes a "pudd'nhead" of David Wilson incorporates key elements of an enduring American cultural critique – namely, that social categories (e.g., race) are constructions, and that the autonomous individual is the leading such category in Western bourgeois culture. *Pudd'nhead* is typical of the late nineteenth century in its containment of an impulse to subvert the category of the autonomous self. The challenge to convention generally features divided, doubled, or crossed selves. *Pudd'nhead* employs all three, though in the crossing of Tom and Chambers it foregrounds the third and most disruptive, where the attempt to keep selves separate is "defeated at every point by the complete merging of both selves in each character simultaneously." Marcus emphasizes that such assaults on the integral self are always contained by hegemonic processes circulating through the novel (Wilson's fingerprinting display, most notably), and much more broadly through the American culture of the time.

In the concluding essay, "Some of the Ways of Freedom in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*," John H. Schaar draws into alignment with the consensus opinion that the novel is a maze of inconsistencies and contradictions (it is "a mess," he declares). But he cannot join the others in viewing the text's manifest shortcomings as usefully telling symptoms, as seams or fissures through which the analyst may penetrate

to profitable new insights about Mark Twain's world, and about our own. Rather, inclining toward the position familiarly associated with Hershel Parker, Schaar concludes "that the book is all-but unreadable, that sense cannot be made out of it." It follows that the study of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is a waste of time. Worse yet, Schaar allows that in lavishing our attention on inferior fictions we draw it away from the real life and the real problems that we share with our neighbors. There are no flattering explanations for this anomalous behavior. Still, because he has agreed to participate, Schaar turns in the body of his essay to the examination of what the novel "can teach about the difficulties of thinking and feeling well and justly" about the related topics of freedom and human social classification. He finds that the book contributes little of value to this discussion.

It hardly diminishes the weight of Schaar's position to record that it did not carry the day at the conference for which these essays were originally written, or to venture that it will do little to dampen the current revival of interest in this flawed child of Mark Twain's imagination. On the other hand, there are undoubtedly readers who will complain that his essay should have been placed first, where it could have done the most good. At the very least, "Some of the Ways of Freedom" will be welcomed as a salutary prod to ever-encroaching complacency, a reminder that in laboring to make sense of Mark Twain's ideological swerves and moral evasions we should be equally attentive to those concealed in our own critical enterprise. It is to be hoped, of course, that the essays in this volume justify themselves by opening new perspectives on the past, and by helping us to make our way forward in the present and future. There are human dividends here, perhaps, that Schaar overlooked. Still, he offers a bracing challenge, not only to our assessment of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, but also to many of the assumptions at the foundation of the "new historicism" in American letters, with its emphasis on ideology, and its impulse to reshape the canon.

There is no real disagreement, after all, that *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is a "mess." On this there is something approaching consensus. If most of these essays urge canonical status on *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, they do so with a newly sharpened, ironic sense of what it means to be "non-canonical." Let us recall that it was Mark Twain who first expanded upon the novel's grave structural shortcomings. In *Pudd'nhead Wilson* we have a celebrated white male author whose main fictional concerns are the powerless and the excluded, yet who derides himself, in the preface to this novel so occupied with questions of racial and sexual exclusion, as a "jackleg" novelist. He further com-

plicates matters in the preface to *Those Extraordinary Twins*, making a celebrated "confession" of his own putative lack of authorial control over the work that "changed itself from a farce to a tragedy" – an entertaining confession about the vagaries of "original intention" that perhaps unintentionally, but farcically and tragically, has allowed *both* the long search for some hidden, unifying structure in *Pudd'nhead Wilson and* the dismissal of the novel as "patently unreadable."

Our collective critical response to this history is to do what Mark Twain would say is the only thing we can, that is to follow our training slavishly. We are thus imitating our author's own impulse to have it both ways, offering *Pudd'nhead Wilson* as a new classic – a new masterpiece – while emphatically abandoning the notion of the canonical text as culturally transcendent. All of us in this volume have different ideas of how Mark Twain inserted himself into his book, yet none assumes that the novelist was fully the master of the unexampled literary hybrid that he finally produced. Unifying the twelve very different essays in the collection is a critical approach to unfamiliar texts and how to teach them. We begin with the belief that the lack of control all readers sense in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is a key to the novel's literary and cultural significance. Lack of control for Mark Twain meant freedom from mastery. Or as James Cox would say, Twain left mastery to Henry James, offering himself instead as jack-leg novelist, ever ready to play the irresponsible slave and fool, never able to master the current of plot and pen that enslaved him.[3]

JAMES M. COX

Pudd'nhead Wilson Revisited

Of all our writers, Mark Twain seems most American, as if he, like race, slavery, and the nation itself were referents that couldn't be deconstructed by language. Of course, a deep irony runs right here. *Mark Twain* is, after all, a pen name, signifying, if it signifies anything, that Mark Twain is all writing and nothing but writing. Then too, slavery itself was a fiction – a fiction of law and custom, as Mark Twain reminds us in, and Evan Carton has reminded us about, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. Beyond that, this nation was itself a text intruded into history, and a text not even in its "own" language but in the language of the parent nation against which it was rebelling. That leaves race – something different altogether, in that it signifies both the unity and the separation of the human species. As a word in English, the mother tongue yet not the native language of Nature's Nation, *race* refers at once to the most dynamic activity of humanity – as in the race for the Pacific, or the race to arrive on the moon, or the arms race – and most inertial essence of the human species: the races of the human family.

Even such a scansion of the terms reveals how culturally loaded they are. Equally important, they are morally loaded, even overloaded. It is impossible for an American to think about race and slavery without feeling a strong moral charge running like an electric current right through the thought, and running strong enough to color it. These volatile subjects do not admit of pure thought, if there is such a thing. If slavery was an absolute contradiction in a free country, its abolition left the issue of race, with which it had been as inextricably bound as one Siamese twin to another, not dead but vividly living as a moral, social, and legal issue. It took a hundred years after the abolition of slavery to settle the legal issues surrounding race, and there is no end in sight for the moral, psychological, and social issues of race and racism. My figure of race and slavery as Siamese

twins is not taken lightly (the fatal pun in that last word, coming so unintentionally to hand, should remind us all of the tyranny of language in all matters and particularly so in this one). George Fredrickson has shown us how inexorably attendant upon antislavery arguments was the complementary desire to remove blacks from the country. That wish had been part of Jefferson's vision for getting rid of slavery; it remained part of Lincoln's vision, and Grant's too – even as late as the 1880s; and it dogs liberal rhetoric to this day – as when we are exhorted to be color blind. A black leader in Atlanta was on the mark when he said that to be color blind is to see only white.

If the Old Republic had freed itself from tyranny by force, the New Union, having freed itself from slavery by force, incorporated antislavery rhetoric into an increasingly imperialist foreign policy forever bent on extending the perimeters of the free world. The expansion, begun as a European vision more of acquisition than of freedom until the arrival of the Puritans with their ideology of religious freedom, eventuated in a vision of freedom sufficiently grand to whelm the Puritan and evangelical extensions of religious freedom: the Enlightenment a loaded term in the context of this discussion. The Enlightenment prevailed because it promised freedom from tyranny – the tyranny of government and the tyranny of religion. In the international competition for North America, it was the English who prevailed, and their language along with them (or did the language prevail and they along with it?). In any event, the country was both conceived in the English Enlightenment and born through it. Yet the enlightened country could not free itself from slavery. Even as the Indians, near extinction, continued to be driven west, black slaves continued to be imported. Jefferson in his *Notes on Virginia* could recognize the sadness of the extinction and feel the fear of the importation, could see that the Indians were being reduced to archaeology even as, in the face of expanding slavery, he could tremble for his country when he reflected that God was just. Removal of the Indians accompanied the consolidation of slavery right up to the eve of Civil War. These were the disconcerting terms of both the white man's and the white philosopher's free country.

Sometimes I want to be guilty about this history; sometimes I am less sure. My grandfather, as near as I can make out, owned three slaves, was a captain in the Confederate army, was wounded at the battle of Gauley Bridge in West Virginia, and was brought home by wagon over almost two hundred miles of rutted roads to live out a semiparaplegic life, yet begot eleven children. I don't know whether

I should be guilty about that, although a colleague once told me that I should. The slaves, freed by both proclamation and war, are buried in the graveyard I can see from my kitchen window. Stones, unmarked and uninscribed – save for one marble slab for Edmund Cox – mark their graves, and could, for all I have been able to discover, mark the graves of early white settlers. I am that close to slavery, which yet seems far away. How much closer it must seem to blacks I find myself imagining, yet cannot know. I mention these facts not so much to reveal them as to provide a transition from the larger context of race, slavery, and America to the author and the text under discussion.

Samuel Clemens lived the first twenty-five years of his life not merely in the Old Republic but in a slave state. He resigned, as he referred to his desertion, from the Confederate army, and so he was both a traitor and a deserter, a capital criminal. Mark Twain was born, as far as we can be sure, in 1863 in Virginia City, Nevada Territory. It was Samuel Clemens's sixth pseudonym, and it stuck. He had tried Thomas Jefferson Snodgrass, Quintus Curtius Snodgrass, Sergeant Fathom, Josh, and W. Epaminondas Adrastus Blab. Thirty years later, he would be writing *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. Forty-seven years and a few months later he would be dead. Samuel Clemens, born in 1835, came in with Halley's Comet and went out with it, as he once promised he would. If he liked the analogy of his own red hair to the fiery hair of the comet, he no doubt liked equally well the fact that, although this comet was predictable, it was nonetheless a far-ranging cosmic traveler. Mark Twain's full success as a writer came with a publisher named Bliss; he went bankrupt investing in a typesetter made by an inventor named Paige; he spent the last years of his life dictating his autobiography to a man named Paine; the stenographer who recorded the dictation was a woman named Lyon. Launched with Bliss, ruined (or so he contended) by Paige, and giving his life to Paine with Lyon as recorder: these are facts that I cannot believe were lost on Mark Twain, and I like to think that he made what he could of them.

The fact of Mark Twain's having dictated his life to Paine should remind us of how much talk had been vital for this writer. Not only had he lectured to audiences almost from the beginning of his career, but he also periodically returned to the platform – was, indeed, to make a round-the-world lecture trip to pay the creditors of his bankrupt machine and publishing enterprises. Talk had, for Mark Twain, a primacy that lay behind writing, and he often felt, or said he felt, that writing could not capture that primacy, as if the voice were the soul of language that was always at the point of being lost in the

body of writing. As a lecturer, a performer, Mark Twain sought absolute control of his audiences. Howells, remarking in a letter about Mark Twain's mastery in a Boston performance, observed that "you held the audience in the palm of your hand and tickled it." This desire for complete mastery had its other side. Eagerly as Mark Twain sought control, he was at the same time utterly dependent on the audience, desperately requiring its response. Because he was a humorist, that response was laughter. The response was nothing less than the voice of the other – a vocal yet nonverbal communication not at the end of a performance but all through it, as if the monologue were actually a dialogue. That dialogic relationship with an audience is the drama of the humorist's performance, making it vastly different from a "reading." The audience is from the beginning expecting to be amused, to participate, and to cooperate. More important, the humorist must have the strength to convert the agreeable willingness into a wild and helpless contagion, until the entire audience is literally infected, or, to change the figure, swept up and swept along in the reductive current of helpless laughter. Throughout the performance the humorist maintains a gravity, a deadpan reflecting an almost stupid and unconscious composure – at least he does if he is Mark Twain. His drawl consumes time, slowing both pace and movement, and his hesitation often extends itself into such long pauses that words are poised against silence until silence itself becomes the ultimate compression of humor.

Yet Mark Twain was a writer, his very name a nom de plume, or, as he occasionally and justifiably referred to it, a nom de guerre. Appearing in the middle of Civil War one month after Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, the pen name exposed rather than concealed Samuel Clemens and at the same time suggested the possibility of a double identity residing in a single person. Beyond that, it signified Samuel Clemens's past, referring as it did to the steamboat leadsman's call of two fathoms, which in turn referred either to safe or precarious water, depending on whether the steamboat was entering or leaving dangerous shallows. That was not all. Paul Fatout has contended that the name may have been applied to the Samuel Clemens who habitually ordered two drinks on credit at a Virginia City bar. Putting these two origins of the name together, we have an authorial identity rooted first in independence. Not only did it appear at almost the moment the nation declared itself free from slavery, but Samuel Clemens invariably insisted that the steamboat pilot was the most independent man alive. The name was rooted second in drunkenness, which was different but nonetheless a significant

type of both slavery and freedom, suggesting as it did both helpless addiction and comic irresponsibility.

These aspects of "Mark Twain" taken together suggest a sense of his identity. He is at once the invention and the author of Samuel Clemens. As invention, he marks both his separation from and identity with the man who had lived almost twenty-eight years not only in a country where slavery was constitutional but also in a part of the country that was defending it, yet he is born in a free country and thus marks the difference between the new union and the Old Republic, between the new law and the old, between north and south. At the same time he is a western humorist at the threshold of heading east, and, as the Wild Humorist from the Pacific Slope, he marks the difference between territory and settlement, between low and high literature, between popular and genteel culture, between humor and high seriousness, between west and east.

If we look at Samuel Clemens in 1892 and 1893, when he was writing *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, he was fifty-seven years old, had lived with Mark Twain for more than half his life, had experienced enormous financial success, yet was facing financial failure in his two major investments: a publishing house in which he was senior partner, and a typesetter in which he was chief investor. Even as he was writing *Pudd'nhead*, he made hurried trips to America from Italy, where he had established a residence in Florence partly to economize his diminishing capital. He had lived the first half of his life without the identity of Mark Twain in a world where slavery was legal, and the second half with Mark Twain in a world where it was abolished. Under the signature—we might say in the handwriting—of Mark Twain he had not only become a world traveler and travel writer, but also had managed a reconstruction of his past that carried him into the world of childhood on the great Mississippi. In *Huckleberry Finn*, he had worked a remarkable conversion of nineteenth-century romanticism into the form of the realistic novel. Locating the poetic myth of childhood upon a raft drifting ever deeper into the slavery of the historically invalidated antebellum South, he made Huck's drifting journey seem a courageous confrontation with the slavery in which he had his historical being. Thus, Huck's "development" is an expression of the historical progress from slavery to freedom. At the same time, the Wordsworthian romantic poetic vision remains very much intact—the vision that childhood's free relation with nature will die into the oppressive conformity of adult society. To negotiate this double vision, Mark Twain (or was it Samuel Clemens?) threw himself out of the book to release Huck Finn's deviant current

of language – a vernacular embodying a seemingly clear and realistic Sancho Panza vision of human life charged with a romantic quest for freedom.

Without becoming embroiled in an interpretation or resolution of the double vision in *Huckleberry Finn*, I do want to emphasize how much slavery and freedom are interfused in the novel. Huck and Jim both live in a world of slavery: Huck is free, Jim is a slave. The river, the natural and seemingly free force in the book, making the raft upon its drifting current seem a free place, is yet naturally determined by the law of gravity and is drifting both free boy and slave man deeper into slavery. The current of language seems free, asserting itself against the correct and oppressive rules of civilized or formal adult discourse irrespective of pre- or post-Civil War society. Thus Huck is helplessly rebelling against the law of his own society at the same time that he is violating the rules of genteel propriety. The point to remember here is that he is helpless; he can't help his language and he can't help being for Jim: he is naturally deviant and must then rely on deviousness to help himself. Because he is helplessly, or we could say naturally, against the law of his own society he is consciously a fugitive, even a criminal. His justification of his actions – and he must justify himself because he has internalized both the law of the society as well as his feeling of responsibility to Jim – is animated by a twinned or double conscience that charges him with fear of the slave law on the one hand and with guilt of betraying his friend on the other. This doubled conscience, likened to a "yaller dog," dogs him the deeper he moves downstream, forever threatening the ease and comfort he seeks.

The larger deviousness of *Huckleberry Finn* lies in its relation to an audience in a constitutionally free rather than a slave world. Whereas Huck is a fugitive in the world of slavery, he is the appealing and good-hearted free child to an audience of free secular adults whose moral sense at once approves and is comforted by his involvement in helping a runaway slave. Huck's narrative – written and not spoken – plays upon a secret agreement between writer and reader, the agreement that the white boy's relation of his friendship with and aid to a runaway slave, illegal and disapproved in his own society, will be utterly legal and righteously approved in the free society of Huck's readers. Of all the confidence games played in the book, that act of confidence lies at the heart of Mark Twain's conception of Huck as author of the book. Displacing himself as writer with Huck's "free" and "natural" vernacular, Mark Twain actually divides the will of the book between Huck the writer of a letter signed "Yours

truly" and an unnamed, unsignified reader. The letter, not scarlet but black and white, even as it comes across the gulf dividing the historically, legally, and morally invalid slave society from our own legally, morally, and presently constituted world of freedom, is in its language so possessed of a semblance of freedom as to emphasize the *psychological* presence of slavery in a free adult society. As a result of having removed himself from his own fiction, Mark Twain frees his readers, his audience in a free society, to "right" Huck's wrong vision of his actions and provide a positive affirmation over and above Huck's negative relation to the morality of his own society. This inversion is nothing less than the audience's active will, operating not only as a double of the outcast author's inferred intentions but also as a double of Huck's implicit appeal for understanding in all the tight places in which he finds himself.

All this is but an inadequate preface to *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, yet there is one more point to make about the Mark Twain discovered in the Nevada Territory by a Samuel Clemens who went there evading the Civil War and looking for silver. He was not only a product of the new world of American freedom but also a naked embodiment of the capitalist ideology that literally funded the freedom. It was Mark Twain's naked relation to money – to silver – that at once distinguishes and characterizes him among our so-called major writers of the nineteenth century. It is possible, as the criticism of his work in the last hundred years makes evident, to deplore this crucial and vital aspect of his identity. Without simply praising it, I do want to acknowledge the courage involved in Mark Twain's willingness not only to enter, but also to expose his desire to conquer, the marketplace. He sought to be a part of the selling of his writing – sought, in effect, to sell himself; he was to be the trademark, the very brand, of Samuel Clemens's inventions. As a lecturer, he wanted to stand before sold-out houses and sell them on his jokes so that they would be sold. The double of this wish to sell himself was the wish to control the means of production of his work. He had, like Franklin, been a printer, and his desire as a writer was to own not only the company which printed his own work, but also the typesetter which, he rightly recognized, could technologically remove the old laborious task of justifying the right-hand margin. No small part of his motive in writing *Pudd'nhead Wilson* was to save both his publishing house and his typesetter from the panic of 1893. His effort failed.

Pudd'nhead Wilson is not among Mark Twain's best-known works. Of course it is known to specialists, but we shouldn't forget that F. R.

Leavis rescued it from relative oblivion in an old Grove Press edition and wrote an introduction classically misreading the text – at least from the cultural perspective that focuses on race and conflict. There was precious little written on the book when I first approached it in 1955. I emphasize the words *precious little* with a fond nostalgia, since that was a time when an outsetting teacher of American literature could hallucinate the possibility of reading everything written about any American author. Having been brought up a New Critic, I am now beset all around by intertextualism, metatextualism, traces, and tropes, and can only see that if there is a race in trace, as a black colleague pointed out to me, there is a rope in trope. Facing the rush of criticism through phenomenology, new historicism, affectivism, structuralism, reader response criticism, poststructuralism, and all varieties of deconstruction, I feel like Hawthorne, who noted that there comes a time when a person, no longer at home in seeking newer fashions in clothes, settles for being left behind in the old clothes that suit him. Such a person has reached the inertia at the heart of generation, the astonished recognition that he is repeating the life of the fathers. I have even returned to the farm I was raised on and the house I was born in. Yet living so close to that cemetery visible from my kitchen window to the west, death begins to come sufficiently to life to make me run after the new generation to catch whatever life it is casting behind. Still I'm old fashioned enough to want to take texts as I find them. By that I mean I want the published text to take precedence over whatever deletions or changes can be detected in the manuscript. Dismayed by those deletions, changes, and false starts he feels he has discovered, Hershel Parker is pleased to show us a Mark Twain who didn't know what he was doing. Mark Twain had never contended that he knew, and the text of *Pudd'nhead* is a problem because Mark Twain made it a problem in his published text. Whereas in *Huckleberry Finn* he had thrown himself out of the text, threatening anyone who found moral, motive, or plot with punishment, banishment, and execution, in *Pudd'nhead* he keeps himself very much present. He goes so far as to narrate the origins of his conception and to include the wreckage of the first story which had been, he says at the conclusion of his "final remarks" (appended to the text of *Those Extraordinary Twins*), "dug out" of the second story that had in effect grown around it – a literary Caesarean operation.[1] The reader who reads texts and novels linearly "forward" is led from the "tragedy," the second story, through Mark Twain's account of the process of creation, to the "farce," or seed story, that has been so deformed in its removal as to require authorial commentary to fill in le-

sions and explain discontinuities. Thus the reader's experience pursues Mark Twain's invention from its end to its beginning, from the "finished" tragedy of slavery and detection to the farce of twin freaks. The bound book turns out to be a Siamese-twinned form with Mark Twain's account of the origin providing the ligature between tragedy and farce.

If we proceed along this linear path, we find ourselves moving from the highly plotted, arbitrarily willed tragedy of changelings in a slave society, through the author's account of himself as an incompetent jackleg who lacks mastery of his craft yet remains arbitrary in his decisions, and who, when he doesn't know what to do with characters, drowns them in a well, to the originating so-called suppressed farce about Siamese twins whose single torso forked into two heads with opposed wills. And we move from the Pudd'nhead Wilson who, acting as lawyer-detective defending one of the separated twins in the tragedy, identifies the criminal changeling who has murdered Judge Driscoll, the most honored citizen in the village of Dawson's Landing, and restores the law, the instituted will, of the master-slave society – we move from this Wilson's triumphant victory to the Wilson of *Those Extraordinary Twins*, who, defending the Siamese twins, breaks the will and common-sense law of Justice Robinson by contending that because innocence and guilt reside in a single body, the guilty half cannot be punished without criminally afflicting the innocent. Having broken – or at least paralyzed – the law, Wilson is rewarded by being made mayor. Luigi, the twin who kicked Tom, is elected alderman but cannot take his seat without his brother anymore than he can be seated with him. The matter being once more before the courts, they remain powerless to settle the case, and so the citizens settle it by hanging Luigi. So ends the farce, which has been pushed to the status of a side show (upon the recommendation by one citizen that Luigi be hanged, another says "That's the ticket" [169]). The author of this Siamese-twin novel, in effect saying "Luigi be hanged," appends his "Final Remarks," rehearsing the matter of his ligaturial account of how the characters of Roxy, Tom Driscoll, and Pudd'nhead took over the original story. Having to give them something to do, he says he first provided the action, then reasons for the action, until "the whole show was being run by the new people and in their interest, and the original show was become side-tracked and forgotten."

To proceed from the finished "tragedy" to the suppressed farce is not "to remount the stream of composition" as Henry James said of himself in writing his prefaces for the New York Edition, but to pursue the stream of composition up river to its source. In our end is our beginning. This stream is represented in the form of a will – will

as it bequeaths the narrative into our hands, as it arbitrarily operates between master and slave, as it is socially instituted in the law, as it documents legitimate property, and as it characterizes the process of narrative composition. The predominant issue of will is evident in the very title of the book, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, fatally reminding us of Edgar Poe's "William Wilson." Certainly Poe is deeply inscribed in this book, not only in the name of the titular hero, but also in his role as amateur detective. William Wilson, Will-I-am Will's Son, was Poe's anagram for his self-willed narrator whose life of unspeakable crime had begun with his pursuit of his double, who seemed both twin and conscience, through all the capitals of Europe before finally confronting and killing it in Rome. And Poe's detective, C. Auguste Dupin, in the same self-willed way, actually invents the very crime he solves. He first reads the narrator's mind in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," then reads the account of the insoluble crime in the newspaper, and finally provides the solution of the crime in the form of a narrative "deduction" that produces the criminal, as if by prestidigitation, as the denouement of his account. That isn't all. The criminal isn't even a criminal, but a sailor whose orangutan aped its master by trying to shave with a razor, escaped, and killed the women, uttering in the attack sounds that all witnesses who could hear but not see the crime attributed to a foreigner. Here was truly an original crime, a crime without a motive that Dupin both invests and solves. He is even called a double Dupin, possessor of a bipartite soul at once creative and resolvent. I dwell on Poe, who fell from birth in Boston into the South, because he is a true forerunner of Mark Twain, with his recognition that the reader is the double of the author, that the text is thus the mechanically designed invention relating them, and that the issue for the modern world will be original crime, not original sin. The Indo-European root of the word *crime* refers to a hoarse, rough sound.

But Mark Twain is different from Poe. Poe in his criticism claimed for the artist a mastery of conscious conception resulting in a narrative architecture of total design. Mark Twain presents himself – *after* his finished tragedy – as a helpless slave of an unconscious will, a writer at the mercy of a narrative current and willful characters taking their own way. His counterthrust to this unbidden thrust, especially in this book, is an increasingly arbitrary exercise of plot machinery. Thrust and counterthrust are in their way an articulation of the master-slave theme of the narrative; they also reflect the old contradiction in Mark Twain's identity between the wish to maintain absolute control of production and the impulse to be a slave to