The Mechanism of Self-Identification and Self-Deception: A Study of Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*

Megumi Iizuka

1. From "Those Extraordinary Twins" to *Pudd'nhead Wilson*

If Mark Twain had the privilege of living in this age of modern medicine, he would show, perhaps more than anybody else, a keen interest in the consequence of the surgery separating the Siamese twins in Vietnam which was performed in 1988. According to Leslie A. Fiedler's study of people who have been called "freaks," the earliest surgery separating a pair of Siamese twins known to history dates as far back as to the fifth century. This surgery was performed in order to save the surviving half from the other half that had died from disease. From the seventeenth century, an attempt to surgically divide a living pair of Siamese twins is recorded.[1] As soon as science acquired the necessary skills, Siamese twins have, in fact, been doomed to be separated, for two persons to be physically united is considered unnatural and wrong, sometimes even ominous. Siamese twins, with their two separate selves in one united body, challenge the notion of human integrity.

The anxiety of losing his sense of self constantly frightened and fascinated Mark Twain. Branford Smith points out that such motifs as disguise, deception, self-deception and make-believe that recurrently appear in his works may be considered to show his concern with identity.[2] Twain was fascinated with and haunted by the subject of Siamese twins or twinhood in general throughout his career as a writer. One of his earliest attempts to write about Siamese twins was "Personal Habits of the Siamese Twins," a short farcical sketch published in 1869. In 1875, with a renewed interest in the confusion of identities and its psychological effect, he wrote "An Encounter With an Interviewer," a very short piece of burlesque writing in the form of a record

of an interview of the author by a dull young man. Asked about his dead brother "Bill," the author tells the interviewer that "Bill" had been his twin brother but had been drowned when he was only two weeks old. The brothers were told apart by a mole on the back of one boy's hand, and the author claims that he was the one with the mark. And it was the baby with the mole that was drowned! The interviewer curtly refuses to go along with this nonsense and says:

> Q. Very well, then, I don't see that there is any mystery about it, after all.
> A. You don't? Well, *I* do. Anyway, I don't see how they could ever have been such a blundering lot as to go and bury the wrong child. But, 'sh! — don't mention it where my family can hear of it. Heaven knows they have heartbreaking troubles enough without adding this.[3]

This piece was written just as Twain was struggling to establish himself in the Northeast. We see here his own sense of horrible confusion or sense of split of his identity as an artist and a family man.

In composing "Those Extraordinary Twins," which consequently developed into *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (first appeared as a magazine serial in 1893), he started out dealing with the theme of double identity once again, which had personal and psychological significance for him. This time he introduced Luigi and Angelo Cappello, a pair of Italian Siamese twins. The story develops around the farcical arrangements concerning the control over the mutual pair of legs. The brothers take turns, a week at a time, at having the command over the legs; yet such an arrangement does not help them to overcome their frustrations. Last week, Angelo's will was ignored, and this week it is Luigi's turn to endure inconvenience or even humiliation. The same situation will continue as long as they live; they will remain enslaved to each other for the rest of their lives.

However, a new dimension is added to the problem of identity in the course of the political campaign. During the last week of the campaign, Luigi takes advantage of having the control of their legs and destroys Angelo's chance as a political candidate and also as a candidate for Rowena's love: Luigi drinks

whisky and this makes Angelo, who has not drunk a drop, dead drunk. Rowena gets angry with Angelo because he has professed himself a teetotaler but still appears totally drunk at a meeting:

> She said she would never marry a man who drank.
>
> "But I don't drink," he pleaded.
>
> "That's not the point," she said, "you get drunk, and that is worse."[4]

Luigi has no part in this conversation. It is as if the author were treating Angelo as a normal, single person. A shift in interest is recognized here: Twain now takes up the division within a person, a disparity between his own estimation of himself and the judgement inflicted on him by others. In other words, Twain brings in the social aspect in dealing with a person's identity crisis: Angelo is not only enslaved to his inherent body, but also to the society that estimates his value by how he appears.

Realizing the difficulty of surpassing the sense of primitive awe and horror that one sees in the figure of Siamese twins as a reflection of his own confusion in self and other, Twain gave up the idea of using the Siamese brothers as the protagonists.[5] Instead, he turned to develop his disruption-and-enslavement theme in depicting the fate of the mulatto slaves in the antebellum South. Of all Twain's works, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is the most effective and impressive criticism of the evil institution that long thrived in America.[6] Yet another plot was added as another character, David "Pudd'nhead" Wilson, walked into the story with his knowledge of fingerprints. The new plot involved the detection of a crime, and at the same time a man's rise from obscurity to eminence. The story about a pair of Siamese twins that was to become a short farcical tale was now crowded with such other serious themes as double identity, slavery, detection, and the process of a man's acceptance by a community. In *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Twain managed to interweave these seemingly different plots and themes in a unified work with a fabular meaning.

The story opens with a fairly detailed description of the town of Dawson's Landing. We know that St. Petersburg, which Tom Sawyer and Huckleber-

ry Finn inhabited, is to be seen as a reminiscence of the Hannibal of Twain's boyhood. Hannibal turned into Dawson's Landing as it will later turn into Eseldorf in *The Mysterious Stranger*. It is in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* that Twain depicts the community as a whole for the first time.

Twain begins his introduction of the town by giving a rather lengthy account of the average house and the streets. The frame dwellings are not large but comfortable, and their walls are covered with rose vines and other flowers. There is a garden in front of each house, and every window is decorated with geraniums. Then the paragraph is rounded off by presenting the symbol of contentment and peace of each household: "the cat was there — in sunny weather — stretched at full length, asleep and blissful, with her furry belly to the sun and a paw curved over her nose" (3). A perfectly snug little town it seems to be, yet there is something in the narrator's tone that makes the readers withhold judgement. We are aware that, in any human society, we can find not only the sunny side shown by such a description but also, at the same time, a dark, deformed side. The picture of a plump, slumbering cat as an emblem of contentment seems phony because it is felt that the narrator is subtly satiring the notion of a uniform happiness in the community. When the narrator tells us that the transients are "stocked with every imaginable comfort or necessity which the Mississippi's communities could want" (4), the intent to ridicule is even less covert: the narrator is asking, "How much could such a petty rural community want?" Not much, of course.

Then we are told that "Dawson's Landing was a slave-holding town, with a rich slave-worked grain and pork country back of it" (4). The more the narrator emphasizes how peaceful and contented the town is, the more he calls attention to the evil (that is, slavery) upon which the community thrives in its paltry way. It is said that the town was "sleepy": when Twain labels a community "sleepy" (as he did Camelot in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* and Eseldorf in *The Mysterious Stranger*,) he indicates that the town means no evil and is innocent, but yet is ignorant and unquestioning of the corruption underneath. Each individual in the community means well and is even affable. However, as a social entity, it cannot be free from blame because its scheme of moral values and its social system, structured on the blind acceptance of these values, are iniquitous. The dormant cat at

each house front emblematizes only self-satisfaction that lacks a wider and more thorough insight which would enable the people to see injustice. What is even more ironic is that the members of this community consider a home without this manifestation imperfect: they take pains to announce their shallowness to the world.

Henry Nash Smith suggests that the indolence with which Twain characterizes the South has two associations for him. One is "intellectual apathy, ignorance and credulity," and the other the "dreamlike peace and happiness of childhood."[7] The two contrasting associations that Smith designates become two contrasting points of view when Twain fictionalizes his boyhood South. In *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, he achieved a detached point of view to regard both aspects by reigning over the tale as an omniscient, ironic narrator whose cynicism is apparent even in the first several paragraphs. Characteristic of a narrative, irony derives from the gap between the narrator's point of view and that of the characters. The setting of the story, Dawson's Landing, served him as the archetypal image of society; and using it, Twain made a fabular, not realistic, approach to American history to investigate man's identity-crisis — a theme that continued to haunt his mind.

2. Slavery and Democratic Aristocracy in Dawson's Landing

When William Dean Howells recalled what a "desouthernized Southerner" Twain was, he had in mind Twain's abhorrence of slavery. In his passage remembering Twain's attitude toward the black race, Howells records Twain's reaction to an incident involving a young mulatto:

> About that time a colored cadet was expelled from West Point for some point of conduct "unbecoming an officer and gentleman," and there was the usual shabby philosophy in a portion of the press to the effect that a negro could never feel the claim of honor. The man was fifteen parts white, but, "Oh, yes," Clemens said, with bitter irony, "it was that one part that undid him."[8]

The injustice done to the black race long haunted Twain who grew up in a

slave-holding community, and he took up miscegenation in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* — a theme also suitable for developing his personal concern with disrupted identity.

In the book, Twain created a mulatto, Roxy, who embodies the idea of a dual nature in a single person that he first raised in his treatment of the Siamese twins in the earlier version. Since Roxy is only one-sixteenth black, she not only appears white, but her complexion is "very fair" (8). She is a woman massively put together and has a graceful attitude. Yet all these admirable qualities are concealed, just as her beautiful abundant brown hair is always concealed under a checkered handkerchief, under the mask of her speech that sounds as black as anybody else. Twain's use of black English is superb here: Roxy's language serves as a social marker indicating the caste system in America, where anybody whose language sounds "black" is confined to slavery.

Roxy sees a chance to save her son from slavery by merely changing his attire with that of her master's baby.[9] Her son Tom (born Valet de Chambre) grows up to be a pertinent, obnoxious boy, teaching Roxy "her place" by making her "the humble and unresisting victim of his capricious temper and vicious nature" (21). Roxy is compelled to admit that her mother-son relationship with him has turned into a slave-master relationship. She contemplates telling the world the truth and prosecuting Tom as an imposter "for the appeasing of her vengeance-hungry heart" (22), but fails to do so because there is no one to confirm the validity of her testimony.

When Roxy speaks of vengeance, she really means something different from avenging herself on Tom. She means revenge on the white race in general, and she desires to accomplish this through Tom:

> And yet the moment Tom happened to be good to her, and kind — this occurred every now and then — all her sore places were healed and she was happy; happy and proud, for this was her son, her nigger son, lording it among the whites and securely avenging their crimes against her race. (22)

Roxy thus takes advantage of the townspeople who do not notice that the

town's most prominent citizen's son has been replaced by a mulatto slave's boy. Tom now has two meanings for her: as her iniquitous master, he is a target of personal revenge, but as her son he is a means to punish the whole white race. To Roxy, therefore, Tom is both a white master and a black son, embodying both subjection and domination at the same time.

For Roxy, whose sense of the self wavers between the "whitehood" and the "blackhood" that co-exist in herself, the only means to identify herself is to secure her rank in the community. In her ambition to attain a higher position in life, Roxy necessarily has to make it clear that she is different from her fellow kitchen crew. Complexion is the factor that distinguishes her from the others: in a playful verbal fencing with Jasper, the black giant, she exclaims, "I got sump'n better to do den 'sociat'n wid niggers as black as you is" (8). This statement is to be taken as her proclamation of superiority to other blacks. The fact that the white man whose child she bore was a descendant of one of the First Families of Virginia also contributes much to her sense of honor.

Roxy makes her status among the blacks firmer when she comes back from eight years of steamboating. In *Life on The Mississippi*, Twain has furnished some information on how much the steamboat crew were admired by the "landsmen." Just as pilots evoked the admiration of the white boys in river communities, the black people working on the boats were "distinguished personages in their grade of life, and they were well aware of the fact."[10] Roxy receives the same grand honor on her return from the river; now she is queen among her own caste.

Yet however proud she may be of the "whitehood" in her and of her life on the Mississippi, she is still a black and therefore cannot climb the social ladder as high as she desires to. To make matters worse, the bank in which she had deposited the money earned on the boat goes bankrupt, and also she is bodily disabled. She went to the river hoping "she would be independent of the human race thenceforth forevermore if hard work and economy could accomplish it" (33); now, far from being independent, she has no means to support herself. Since it has become clear that "hard work and economy" lead nowhere, her aspiration must be fulfilled through her son Tom, to whom a fortune is promised.

However, Tom, who is brought up as the heir to the town's chief citizen, is "petted and indulged and spoiled to his entire contentment" (23). He also much resembles his foster father, Percy Driscoll, in his attitude toward the black race. When Chambers in his boyhood retaliated Tom's unreasonable cuffings, Percy Driscoll "told Chambers that under no provocation whatever was he privileged to lift his hand against his little master" and gave him "convincing canings" when Chambers attempted a desperate resistance (19). That Tom never hunts for a job, but ends up not being able to extricate himself from gambling may also be considered the influence of Percy Driscoll. Percy made his living by speculation, and although he had successes, he died leaving nothing for Tom; Tom followed Percy's example by winning quite a large amount of money at first, but owing a great debt in the end. It is because Tom sees Roxy as nothing but a valuable property that he sells her to a farm in Arkansas, knowing how cruelly slaves are treated there. Only Roxy fails to see that Tom can never again be her son, but will remain her master. She is deceived by the education and training as a white aristocrat that Tom has received — the education and training that she so earnestly wished him to receive led to the failure in the end. The values Roxy has resorted to as a means for self-identification is proved to be meaningless by the society that holds the color distinction its creed, when they unanimously agree to treat Tom, whom they have unanimously treated as a white aristocrat, as a black slave and sell him down the river. This is where Twain is at his ironic best.

Since the value system to which Roxy adheres and, at the same time, is enslaved to, is that of the community itself, it is necessary to examine Dawson's Landing in this light. At the very beginning of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, the narrator introduces the community as an entity and then goes on to introduce its chief citizens, the descendants of the First Families of Virginia. The presence of the F.F.V.s are also reminiscent of Twain's boyhood Hannibal. He tells of the "aristocratic taint" in Hannibal in a passage in his *Autobiography*:

> ... there were grades of society — people of good family, people of unclassified family, people of no family. Everybody knew everybody and was affable to everybody and nobody put on any visible airs; yet the

> class lines were quite clearly drawn and the familiar social life of each class was restricted to that class. It was a little democracy which was full of liberty, equality and Fourth of July, and sincerely so, too: yet you perceived that the aristocratic taint was there. It was there and nobody found fault with the fact or even stopped to reflect that its presence was an inconsistency.[11]

Twain had already made a fierce attack on the "aristocratic taint" in the South in a famous passage in *Life on the Mississippi*, blaming Sir Walter Scott for creating "rank and caste down there, and also reverence for rank and caste, and pride and pleasure in them." Interestingly, Twain goes on in the same passage to suggest that aristocracy and slavery are inseparable: "Enough is laid on slavery, without fathering upon it these creations and contributions of Sir Walter."[12]

The side-by-side references to aristocracy and slavery show Twain's understanding that the two institutions stem from the same root. Both systems consist of certain social ranks, and society identifies a man by his social rank. Not only that, the man himself seeks his identity by attaining a social rank. Twain implies that the only way for a man to overcome identity crisis is to establish his position within the framework of social strata. Identity is understood as relative value, not absolute.

Roxy, who wavers between her "whitehood" and "blackhood," shows an almost racist attitude toward her fellow slaves because of her sense of split identity by claiming superiority over them just because her complexion is fair. She strives to identify herself by setting up a sub-caste (fair Negro) within a caste (slaves) that lies at the bottom of a yet greater caste (the people of Dawson's Landing). In this way, she has become an avid supporter of slavery. Her putting her baby into the town's aristocracy may be accounted as a desperate effort to insure her identity by attaching herself to what she considers a noble caste.[13] The same psychological explanation applies to the middle-class citizens of Dawson's Landing. They take for granted the desirability of respecting the F.F.V.s and owning slaves; they place themselves between the aristocrats and the slaves.

As a matter of fact, both aristocracy and slavery were attacked in Twain's

previous work, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. In writing it, Twain depended much on William Edward Hartpole Lecky's *History of European Morals* and *History of England in the Eighteenth Century* to depict medieval ages. At the same time, he used materials from the nineteenth century America for his illustration of slavery in Arthur's kingdom. He found these materials in Charles Ball's *Slavery in the United States* (1837).[14] That modern American material should serve to illustrate the sixth century Britain was contradictory to the belief that human history progresses as time passes. The superiority of democratic America over aristocratic Europe was denied. Mark Twain, whose life had been deeply rooted in the American Dream, was beginning to question his earlier pride in his country. That the twinned brothers in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* are of Italian nobility is of some significance in revealing Twain's ambivalent attitude toward his native country.

When the twins make their appearance in Dawson's Landing, they are received with much enthusiasm. Rowena Cooper's reaction to the twins' self-introduction represents the attitude of the whole town: "Rowena's heart gave a great bound, her nostrils expanded, and a fine light played in her eyes" (27). Significantly, they are referred to by the narrator favorably, although Dawson's Landing gives the cold shoulder to them soon after the initial enthusiasm wanes. For instance, the brothers befriend Wilson and share his irritation at the humiliation inflicted upon him by Tom Driscoll. Luigi's confessed murder is treated as a heroic act. The brothers show fairness in not hesitating a bit to rush to the Judge's rescue, even though he was their arch fiend.

In contrast with the Italian twins is York Leicester Driscoll, "the Judge," a proud American aristocrat. When he gets the privilege of showing the twins over the town, he takes pains to show them only what he considers the cream of New World democracy:

> The Judge showed the strangers the new graveyard, and the jail, and where the richest man lived, and the Freemason's hall, and the Methodist church, and the Presbyterian church, and the Baptist church ... and the slaughter-house, and got out the independent fire company in uniform .... (31)

This sounds like the tawdry list of institutions that the Connecticut Yankee Hank Morgan was eager to introduce to Arthurian England. Considering the fact that Twain lived in the ancient city of Florence at the time of writing *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, would not the cityscape of Dawson's Landing have looked cheap and undignified compared to the beautiful view over Florence that he admired from the terrace of Villa Viviani, his abode in Italy?[15]

If the town is undignified, so is its chief citizen. Although initially introduced as a "fine, and just, and generous" (4) gentleman, Judge Driscoll betrays his narrow-mindedness at the time of the electoral campaign. A doting uncle, he swallows Tom's appeal whole and sets his mind on dragging the twins down from their popularity. He calls the twins different names and even assails "their showy titles with measureless derision" (83). He does not do so out of sheer democratic spirit, though. It should be remembered that he himself has long been proudly wearing a title, "the Judge": not all titles are bad — only the European ones are.

Twain ridiculed the American enthusiasm of earning a title in his *Autobiography*:

> Titles of honor and dignity once acquired in a democracy, even by accident and properly usable for only forty-eight hours, are as permanent here as eternity is in heaven. You can never take away those titles ... . We adore titles and heredities in our hearts and ridicule them with our mouths. This is our democratic privilege.[16]

Twain asserts that man is haunted with the yearning for a title. He jeers not so much at the yearning itself as at the Americans who profess themselves to be unconcerned about holding a title but who are really intent on earning one under the mask of democracy. Through the figure of Judge Driscoll, Twain attacks the hypocrisy of America.

Twain also mentions that the Judge feels free to buy votes against the detested twins. Here we see another aspect of American democracy: in American society money talks more than anything else. Judge's scheme of buying the votes works well, and the twins are crushed. The town responds just as he designed. In other words, the Judge knows what to do in order to win

the community to his side, because he, as "the chief citizen," represents the spirit of the whole town. He appears to be a kind old man, but he is really capable of practicing fraud. He is parallel to Dawson's Landing, which appears to be a peaceful, idyllic town but which really thrives at the sacrifice of the freedom of the black race. Twain now needed a hero capable of artistically mending the disruption between appearance and reality — the disruption both in America and in his own self.

3. A Stranger Making His Way in a New Community

A story of Roxy and Tom built around the "fiction of law and custom" (9) in Dawson's Landing would not be sufficient to form a book by itself since they have no power to give to their own life history, from Roxy's changing the babies to the disclosure of this secret, a firm structure. Twain assigned this role to David "Pudd'nhead" Wilson, who (practically) induces Roxy to change the babies by hinting to her that the two babies look alike and who, after twenty-three years identifies Tom as Valet de Chambre.

One way to look at Wilson's structural role is to contrast his fate with Tom's. Wilson's fatal remark on first arriving the town is made when "an invisible dog began to yelp and snarl and howl and make himself very comprehensively disagreeable" (5). Interestingly, through the narrative there are several references to Tom as a "dog": for instance, Roxy calls him "de lowdownest orneriest hound" (90) when she finds out that he has sold her down to Arkansas on purpose, and Wilson refers to him as a "miserable dog" (103).[17] Therefore, Wilson's twenty-three years of obscurity can be understood as a continuous effort to search for this "invisible dog." His collection of fingerprints turns out to be not a mere fad but a means to identify the "dog" — to identify the invisible reality by a visible proof, that is, fingerprints. He thus assumes the role of the detective, and his isolation from the town provides him with the objective point of view necessary for detection. Wilson's role, however, is not only to discover the truth, but also to instigate the crime: he is actually the one who gives Roxy a hint ("How do you tell them apart, Roxy, when they haven't any clothes on?") in the beginning (9). This is the multifaceted function of Wilson that Twain called "but-

ton or crank or lever," a means to start and stop the story as if operating a machine.[18] Yet he functions not only structrually to put the doings of Roxy and Tom in order, but also thematically.

One thing peculiar to *Pudd'nhead Wilson* among all Twain's works is that it features maxims at the top of each chapter as remarks from "Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar." Although these maxims are attributed to David Wilson, they should be understood as Twain's remarks rather than Wilson's. Take, for example, the calendar remark about the "three infallible ways of pleasing an author" (47) found at the top of Chapter Eleven, immediately before Wilson reads his maxims to the Italian twins. The twins ask him to lend them his manuscripts to read at home; they work the best of the "three infalliable ways." They know they are deceiving Wilson, and so does the narrator; only Wilson takes the compliment too innocently. Wilson, who is also easily deceived by Tom, is altogether a simple-minded fellow, and unlikely to have written the cynical calendar remarks. Rather, the maxims sound much more like Twain himself.

If the maxims are to be understood as Twain's, the following remark at the very beginning of the book may serve as his thematic manifesto:

> There is no character howsoever good and fine, but it can be destroyed by ridicule, howsoever poor and witless. Observe the ass, for instance: his character is about perfect, he is the choicest spirit among all the humbler animals, yet see what ridicule has brought him to. Instead of feeling complimented when we are called an ass, we are left in doubt. (1)

This applies to Wilson's case, whose career is ruined by the witless townsfolk who cannot even understand a petty, hackneyed joke. It also applies to the blacks and mulattoes in the American South, where they are born labeled "Slaves." That one's existence is defined by others, in whatever ridiculous way, and that one may suffer from it is a general truth and Wilson's case may not be a peculiar one.

Yet, unlike the blacks, Wilson with a college degree in law, is endowed with a chance to recover his name with ingenuity and hard work — a chance to live up to the American Dream of Success. Any examination of Wilson

in this light needs to start with a brief attempt to study a similar case in another of Twain's novels, that is, the case of Hank Morgan in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. There are certain similarities between Wilson and Morgan. Hank, when he first finds himself in the kingdom of Arthur, is considered a perilous personage because of his nineteenth-century attire, and so he is captured. He saves himself by remembering the date of the eclipse and then using the knowledge to escape from confinement. Furthermore, in time he manages to obtain a position next to the King. Although his attempt to create a modern America in King Arthur's realm fails in the end, Hank makes good use of his pragmatic knowledge of technology.

David Wilson, a native of New York, is another version of Twain's yankee. Much less active and talkative than Hank, Wilson seems to be absorbed in a most unpractical fad — the collection of fingerprints. Yet his fad proves to be a very practical means to identify the murderer and also to put the misplaced pair of boys back in their places. Wilson's knowledge of fingerprints not only matches Hank's technology but even surpasses it in scientific validity and usefulness.

There is, however, a major difference in their attitudes towards the community they inhabit. Hank Morgan is a dedicated reformer, whereas Wilson shows no intention of changing Dawson's Landing in any way. Wilson seems to devote his efforts to be accepted by the community and to be acknowledged a full member. About his interest in fingerprint and palmistry he tells little to the townsfolk because "he had found that his fads added to his reputation as a pudd'nhead; therefore he was growing chary of being too communicative about them" (7). That he unquestioningly accepts the code of honor held by Judge Driscoll may serve as another piece of evidence proving Wilson's desire to "belong," since the Judge exemplifies the town, as we have seen, and since the aristocratic codes and customs by which he abides are in themselves the criteria the town upholds.

The process in which Wilson rises from obscurity to win acceptance from Dawson's Landing becomes even clearer by an examination of his career as a lawyer. When he comes to Dawson's Landing, he hires an office and puts up a sign of his business as "Attorney and Counselor at Law. Surveying, conveyancing, etc" (7). Soon, however, it becomes apparent that no client

asks for his service because of his "remark" on killing half a dog. Wilson in time decides to reduce the intended size of his business and put up a new sign declaring his business as land surveyor and accountant. Wilson does not give up his hope to practice law, though, and stays in shape for the opportunity. The chance comes when he takes on the defense of Luigi and, after twenty-three years, makes his debut as a lawyer. His triumph is completed when he names the murderer in the courtroom. Wilson's career in the field of law thus sees his rise from obscurity to eminence in the community. Law is one of the two pillars that support slavery, the other pillar being the whole system of aristocracy. Wilson commits himself completely to the social mode of Dawson's Landing, on both the rational and irrational levels.

In order to consider the meaning of Wilson's rise in Dawson's Landing, it is necessary to examine the role he plays in the community more closely. David Wilson belongs to a group of Twain's creations that may be categorized "stranger-heroes." The stranger-hero is an outsider to the community he inhabits or deals with. Huckleberry Finn, a vagabond orphan, looks at society from a detached viewpoint. Hank Morgan comes to Camelot as a reformer from a world far away — over 3,700 miles in distance and more than a thousand and three hundred years in time.

Twain's fictions of the 1890's are peopled with more of these stranger-heroes. The stranger intent on avenging himself on the townspeople in "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" is a typical figure. The announcements he has forged stirs up the whole town and gives its people a sense of adventure and romance such as they have never experienced before. Interestingly, Mr. and Mrs. Richards who first receive a letter from the unknown stranger decide to let the whole town know of this letter, saying that to deal with the matter privately would "spoil the romance."[19] A stranger comes to a morally dormant town, wakes it up by providing them with a sense of romance and adventure, and stirs them up until they reach a climax, thus giving the townspeople a renewed knowledge of themselves. This is the basic pattern. The figure of the stranger-hero is perhaps most fully developed in *The Mysterious Stranger*, where the hero Satan is completely free from human emotions. Only a non-human being has the privilege of regarding mankind, the damned human race, as one community. The stranger-in-a-community plot

here serves Twain as a basic perspective for looking at humanity as a whole.

These stranger-heroes are endowed with certain qualities by which they transcend the people around them. Each has his own peculiar point of view from which to look at the world. In Huck Finn's case, he rises above the community by his affinity with nature. Hank Morgan surpasses the people of Camelot by his practical technology, although it proves to be unreliable. David transcends Dawson's Landing in that he has knowledge of modern science (fingerprinting) and is able to apply it in a performance of deductive reasoning. Indeed, he acts like a transcendent hero in the final courtroom scene. It is known that in the process of composition Twain, inspired by Sir Francis Galton's *Finger Prints* (1892), wrote this scene before he wrote the exigencies of Roxy's changing the babies. This signifies Twain's primary interest in using the fingerprint material to create a heroic figure.[20]

The kind of eloquence — or rather, showmanship — that Wilson shows when he makes the revelation is shared by others of Twain's characters, notably Tom Sawyer and Hank Morgan. Such showmanship works quite effectively in impressing the simple-minded mass of people. Tom Sawyer's "showing-off" enjoys the greatest victory when Tom walks into the midst of the congregation gathered for his funeral. Hank Morgan makes the most of what he calls the "circus side" of his nature to win the admiration of Arthurian England. Wilson gives the same kind of performance. First he tries a commonplace joke to win the approval of the community, but it refuses to get the joke; that is, the community refuses to share a common mode of communication with him. Twenty-three years later, though, he succeeds in impressing Dawson's Landing with his dramatic eloquence.

Wilson uses several different tactics in delivering his speech. On bringing up the fingerprint matter, he invites the audience to join the investigation by examining their own fingerprints and making comparisons with each other. In urging the people to look at their own fingers, Wilson does not forget to add that a very delicate and intricate pattern may be found only by those "that have very sharp eye sight" (108); he thus rouses a competitive spirit among the people — a most effective trap for Dawson's Landing to walk into, since to press toward the mark of recognition by making diligent efforts is a democratic privilege. He secures the audience's attention by proclaim-

ing that he will surely name the thief within a set period of time: one may doubt if Wilson has not written out a careful scenario so that the murderer might be handcuffed and removed from the room at twelve o'clock sharp. The manner in which Wilson invites certain people to inspect the fingerprint samples resembles that of a stage director appointing the actors to carry out their assigned roles. Wilson succeeds in revealing the truth — that Tom, who has been considered heir to Judge Driscoll, is in reality a murderer and also a mulatto by birth. In this sense, Wilson acts as the hero mending the disruption between appearance of things and the reality hidden underneath it.

Yet the conclusion of the narrative leaves readers with an impression that not all is well, despite Wilson's personal success and the restoration of the two young men's identities. This fuzziness is due to the fact that slavery remains as it is at the end of the story. The hope that Wilson might wake up the morally dormant community is crushed when the revelation he made, as a matter of fact, results in selling a person down the river as a slave — a fate considered most dreadful. It should also be remembered that Wilson is an expert accountant: it is rather natural that he should offer his service in calculating the debt the Driscoll estate owes and winding up its accounts by selling Tom.

In fusing himself with the community, Wilson loses his independent point of view, the objectivity of which has been sustained by his collection of fingerprints. He ceases, that is, to be a stranger-hero. His desire to "belong" and his independence of spirit are incompatible, just like hanging a half of the conglomerate twins or killing half a yelping a dog would kill the whole being. The joke about killing half a dog that Wilson uttered inadvertently in the beginning may be taken to apply to his own self at the end.

The same joke applies to the difficulty Twain had in dealing with the character of David Wilson — a major difficulty in the whole book, as a matter of fact. Twain was interested in a man's rise from inappropriate obscurity to eminence, and at the same time he was fascinated with the idea of introducing a hero in command of a scientific skill that no one else shares with him. He was also intent on creating a hero who would wake up the community from its moral indolence. His design was to realize these two ideas in the single figure of David Wilson. Moral reform can, however, never be achieved

without fighting with the corrupt community: a hero cannot be a hero if he expects acceptance instead of defiance. Twain was always unwilling to create a hero who openly rebels against the community. Tom Sawyer may play tricks on the adults in St. Petersburg, but he never rises against them. Huckleberry Finn witnesses what he considers nauseous incidents on the river shore, but he escapes instead of rebelling against them. That Twain was unable to create a fighting hero may be a reflection of his own fear of antagonizing the society about him.

Although *Pudd'nhead Wilson* bears Wilson's name as the title, we see little of him in the main body of the story, while Roxy and Tom seem to cause the story to develop. When Wilson gives a solo performance for as long as eight pages towards the end, readers are even more surprised than the people of Dawson's Landing. It is rather a pity that Twain was unable to make an effective use of Wilson's role as a moral observer of the town, so to speak, through his collection of fingerprints. Yet the seeming inconsistency we see in Wilson — that he rises to eminence but in reality fails to become a hero — is by no means a digression from the total design of the fable.

4. Conclusion: Self-Identification Turned into Self-Deception

Of all his works, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* shows Mark Twain at his ironic best. Its heavily ironic tone, that dominates throughout the book, strongly sustains the structure of the whole narrative. Characteristic of a narrative, irony derives from the gap between the narrator's point of view and that of the characters. In order to make the most of such a gap, Twain did not allow his characters to come to life in such a way as to develop on their own or to take the plot in their own hands. As already mentioned in the previous chapter of this study, it has been revealed that Twain, inspired by Sir Francis Galton's *Finger Prints*, wrote the courtroom scene in which Wilson makes the revelation using his collection of fingerprints first and then reworked the parts concerning Roxy and Tom so as to make them conform to the ending. Such a process of development is a vital feature of the composition of detective novels, in which it is essential that the mechanism of the plot work exactly as planned.[21] The interest of an oral story teller and that of a writer

of a detective novel coincided in Twain to produce a tale completely under his own control.

The irony prevalent in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* derives from the mechanism of self-deception that each character is trapped in. It is first explicated by the narrator himself in the consequence of Roxy's changing of the babies. The following passage needs to be quoted at length because it is a significant one:

> With all her splendid common sense and practical every-day ability, Roxy was a doting fool of a mother. She was this toward her child ... and she was also more than this: by the fiction created by herself, he was become her master; the necessity of recognizing this relation outwardly and of perfecting herself in the forms ... had moved her to such diligence and faithfulness in practicing these forms that ... it became automatic and unconscious; then a natural result followed: deceptions intended solely for others gradually grew practically into self-deceptions as well .... (19)

Roxy does her best in carrying out her contrivance, but the make-believe turns into real belief. She entertains great expectations of her son's moral and financial success because she believes that the training he receives as an aristocrat will provide him with such qualities; yet her hopes are defeated precisely because her aspirations are deceived by her son, who has been so indulged that he becomes morally corrupted, even a murderer. Her scheme to deceive the community appears to work well at first since nobody notices the change that took place, but eventually she is deceived by her own contrivance.

Tom Driscoll also deceives himself and hands himself over to justice. The night before the trial, he drops in at Wilson's just to amuse himself at the latter's expense. Tom carelessly touches one of Wilson's glass strips marked with a fingerprint and so leaves his own marks upon it. Moreover, the strip happens to be a sample of Roxy's and Tom inadvertently (or rather, very conveniently for the author) says that, according to the date written on the sample, he was then seven months old (two months after the exchange,) at a time when Roxy was "nursing me and her little nigger cub" (103). Thus,

Tom provides Wilson with ample clues to the solution of the murder case and also to the exchange of the children by Roxy. As the fly that flutters about the candle until at last it gets burned, Tom dangles about Wilson until he is identified and arrested.

The mechanism of self-deception in Wilson's case is less apparent compared to that of Roxy and Tom. Wilson's efforts to win acceptance from Dawson's Landing lead to his presiding over the community as the mayor. Wilson assumes the role of justice-restorer in the end, yet the consequence of his revelation leads to the selling of Tom as a piece of property, a practice abhorred by all. Also contradictory to his determination to restore justice is the fact that he instigated the crime in the beginning by planting in Roxy's mind the idea of changing the babies. At the end, he solves the crime he has himself indirectly instigated, leaving three persons — Roxy, Tom and Chambers — unhappy. His personal success depends, then, upon other's misfortune.

A pattern commonly observed in cases of self-deception is that the person's attempt to make him or herself free backfires. Tom comes around and frets Wilson with the intention of confusing Wilson's detection so that he himself will not be indicted for the murder that he committed; Roxy believes she can free herself from the terror of her son being sold down the river; Wilson strives to become an acknowledged member of the community and thus free himself from ridicule and obscurity. Yet Tom is arrested and made a slave; Roxy in the end has her son sold down the river and has to worry about him for the rest of her life; Wilson serves a morally corrupted community as its mayor. In each case, what at first appears to be the way to freedom turns out to be the way to enslavement. The large mechanism of self-deception that thematically holds *Pudd'nhead Wilson* together is supported by minor plots that involve different kinds of reversals. Tom, the young "Marse," falls on his knees before his former slave Roxy; Roxy shows pride in her miscegenetic family history that has forced her into slavery; the Italian twins who are welcomed at first are later rejected; Tom disguises himself as a female when he goes about stealing and Roxy wears men's attire in her escape from Arkansas to St. Louis, thus both reversing their sex.

The mechanism of self-deception that leads a person to a state of enslavement shows on a larger scale Twain's understanding of history. At the very

beginning of the narrative, Twain refers to his story as a "chronicle" (3). The term signifies his intention to reconstruct the part of American history that he has lived himself. He knew of its corruption, slavery and greed for money. He saw for David Wilson a chance to become a saving-hero who redeems at least one town in America from its corrupted history. However, as has been already shown above, Wilson's desire to "belong" to the community immersed him in it instead of causing him to redeem it. This is the process of forming a community, that is, the process in which man makes history. Just as slavery existed in the nineteenth century in the same way as it did in the sixth and the sixteenth centuries, it is manifest that history repeats its evil and folly and that man is forever enslaved to history.[22]

It may be appropriate to recall here the ending of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* in a brief attempt to compare it with *Pudd'nhead.* Hank Morgan, who has obtained political power as "the Boss," brings an end to the whole system of knight-errantry, abolishes slavery, and proclaims the nation to be a republic. However, once the old establishment regains authority, he finds that even those whom he thought he had saved from misery have turned against him:

> Why, even the very men who had lately been slaves were in the "righteous cause," and glorifying it, praying for it, sentimentally slabbering over it, just like all other commoners. Imagine such human muck as this; conceive of this folly![23]

Despite his lament, Hank fails to see that the whole social system, which is laid on slavery, serves as an indispensable means of identifying one's self psychologically. Twain considers this desire to belong to a certain caste an essential human nature, and a necessary one for a society to mature.

In *Pudd'nhead,* Twain leaves Dawson's Landing in peace, unlike the destructive end in *A Connecticut Yankee.* Wilson with his sound sense and ambition is the representative of the American middle class; whereas Hank Morgan belongs to the lower mass in whose morality Twain had little faith.[24] The middle class refuses the tyranny of aristocracy and the mob rule of the lower classes, yet needs both of them so that it can place itself safely in between.

Mark Twain, the advocate of the rising American middle class, was well aware of this. Therefore, although he succeeded in depicting the folly of the aristocratic taint and slavery in the United States, he did not go so far as to destroy them all. He conformed to and repulsed against the middle-class value; the two attitudes remained in his self, hand in hand, like a pair of Siamese brothers.

An examination of a twenty-three-year span in Twain's life reveals that a curious resemblance exists between Wilson's history of twenty-three years of effort to rise from obscurity to fame and the life of Mark Twain himself. Twain worked on *Pudd'nhead Wilson* from 1892 to 1893. Going back twenty-three years brings us back to 1869-1870, both memorable years that saw events crucial to his life: *The Innocents Abroad* was published in 1869, and in the following year he was married to Olivia Langdon. These two events signified his literary and social debut in the Eastern establishment. During the twenty-three years that followed he won literary and worldly renown; he was a "made man for good" by 1892. At the same time, however, age had begun to undermine his health with rheumatism. His finances were seriously crippled, and he was forced on an economic exile in Europe. Twain's best days had gone by, although everywhere in the world he was received as a "lion." Evidently, he stood at a turning point in his life. What did his success mean to him? Had he been able to maintain his integrity? *Pudd'nhead Wilson* may be read in a way as an ostensible biography of David Wilson in which Twain attempted to reexamine his own life.

At the end of *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Twain abandons hope in mankind and its future history. He depicts how man lives essentially in bondage not only by having inhumanities inflicted on him by his fellow beings, but also by walking into it on his own accord. Regardless of color, birth, or faculty, man is forever in enslavement. Only death can emancipate him. This is the view of man at the core of the pessimism that haunted Twain as a man and an artist.

Notes

1 Leslie A. Fiedler, *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978) 197.

2 Branford Smith, "Mark Twain and the Mystery of Identity," *College English* 24 (1963): 425-430.

3 *The Complete Humorous Sketches and Tales of Mark Twain*, ed. Charles Neider (Garden City: Doubleday, 1961) 260.

4 Samuel Langhorne Clemens, *Pudd'nhead Wilson and Those Extraordinary Twins*, ed. Sidney E. Berger, Norton Critical Edition (New York: Norton, 1980) 168. From here on, numbers in parentheses indicate the page numbers from this volume.

5 Of the kind of impact that Siamese twins on exhibition in freak shows have on their audience Leslie Fiedler states: "In joined twins the confusion of the self and other, substance and shadow, ego and other, is more terrifyingly confounded than it is when the child first perceives face to face in the mirror an image moving as he moves, though clearly in another world. In that case, at least, there are only two participants, the perceiver and the perceived; but standing before Siamese Twins, the beholder sees them looking not only at each other, but — both at once — at him." (Fiedler 35-36.)

6 Twain was well aware of the fact that "anti-black repression took multiple forms, legal and extralegal" and that racism was still growing in the 1890's when he was writing *Pudd'nhead*. See Susan Gillman, *Dark Twins: Imposture and Identity in Mark Twain's America* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989) 55.

7 Henry Nash Smith, *Mark Twain: The Development of a Writer* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1962) 157.

8 William Dean Howells, "My Mark Twain," *Literary Friends and Acquaintance*, ed. David F. Hiatt and Edwin H. Cady (Bloominton: Indiana UP, 1968) 277, Vol. 32 of *A Selected Edition of W. D. Howells*.

9 To use clothing as a means to disguise one's true identity is a favourite device of Twain's. See, for example, that the adventures of Tom Canty and Prince Edward in *The Prince and the Pauper* begin when the boys change their clothes.

10 Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*, Penguin American Library (New York: Penguin, 1984) 124.

11 *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*, ed. Charles Neider, Perennial Library Edition (New York: Harper, 1975) 30.

12 Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* 328.

13 Robert Rogers gives a psychological explanation of the mechanism of self-identification in a brief attempt to analyze the mentality of racists: "The inclination of the racist to make an individuous division ... presumably stems ... from an inner, emotional split, an ambivalence generated out of his own confusion about his identity. The racist adopts social myths as a mode of dealing with his own inner tension and insecurity, just as the neurotic does." Rogers, *The Double in Literature* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1970) 6.

14 For Twain's use of historical materials in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, see James D. Williams, "The Use of History in Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*," *PMLA* 80 (1965): 102-110.

15 In a letter to his sister-in-law dated October 1892, Twain describes his enchantment: "No view that I am acquainted with in the world is at all compatible to this for delicacy, charm, exquisiteness, dainty coloring and bewildering rapidity of change. It keeps a person drunk with pleasure all the time." Neider, ed., *The*

Selected Letters of Mark Twain (New York: Harper, 1982) 219.

16 Twain, *Autobiography* 174.

17 Marvin Fisher and Michael Elliott in their "*Pudd'nhead Wilson*: Half a Dog is Worse than None" concentrate on the references to "dogs." *Southern Review*, ns 8 (1972), 3, 533-547.

18 Twain wrote in a letter to his wife that he had "never thought of Pudd'nhead as a *character*, but only as a piece of machinery — button or crank or lever, with a useful function to perform in a machine, but with no dignity above that." *The Love Letters of Mark Twain*, ed. Dixon Wector (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1976) 291.

19 *The Complete Short Stories of Mark Twain*, ed. Charles Neider (New York: Bantam, 1981) 355.

20 Hershel Parker and Henry Binder, "Exigencies of Composition and Publication: *Billy Budd, Sailor* and *Pudd'nhead Wilson*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 33 (1978-79): 131-143.

21 A.E. Murch, *The Development of the Detective Novel* (London: Peter Owen, 1958) 31.

22 Twain depicted slavery in the sixth century England in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, and that in the sixteenth century in *The Prince and the Pauper*.

23 Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, ed. Allison R. Ensor, Norton Critical Edition (New York: Norton, 1982) 247.

24 The implication in *A Connecticut Yankee* is that the red-headed Hank with the surname "Morgan" is of Irish descent. The fact that Twain could not tolerate the mass of poorly-educated Irish immigrants is an example of his distrust in the morality of the lower classes and his fear of mob rule. See Louis J. Budd, *Mark Twain: Social Philosopher* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1962) 32.