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Reading Gender in
Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

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Like Molière's bourgeois gentleman who discovered one day that all the time he thought he was only talking he was in fact speaking prose, literary critics have recently recognized that in their most ordinary expositions of character, plot, and style they speak the language of gender.¹

The terms of critical analysis, its references and allusions, its very structure, these critics now find, incorporate assumptions about the nature of sexual identity that organize and even suggest critical per-

¹Webster's *New World Dictionary*, second college edition (New York: World, 1968), defines gender as follows: "The formal classification by which nouns and pronouns (and often accompanying modifiers) are grouped and inflected, or changed in form, so as to control certain syntactic relationships: although gender is not a formal feature of English, some nouns and the third person singular pronouns are distinguished according to sex or the lack of sex (*man* or *he*, masculine gender; *woman* or *she*, feminine gender; *door* or *it*, neuter gender): in most Indo-European languages and in others, gender is not necessarily correlated with sex." This last specification underlies the choice of "gender" over "sex" as

ception. When we describe certain verse cadences as “virile” while naming some rhymes “feminine,” when Boswell explains judiciously that “Johnson’s language . . . must be allowed to be too masculine for the delicate gentleness of female writing,” the conventional meanings of “masculine” and “feminine” shape the sense of literary phenomena that have no intrinsic association with sex. Posited as analytical terms rather than the objects of analysis, these meanings go unexamined and with them aspects of literature that they seem to explain but actually only name. It would not have occurred to Boswell to reverse the direction of his definition and, instead of invoking the conventional attributes of masculinity to define the limits of Johnson’s language, cite Johnson’s language to define the limits of conventional masculinity. But just such a reversal has been going on in recent critical practice where literary analysis is reflexively querying its own sexual rhetoric. The terms “masculine” and “feminine,” which the eighteenth-century biographer assumed were standard measures, have become for twentieth-century readers the first objects of critical measurement.

Boswell taking masculinity as a given expressed a traditional conviction that the differences between men and women arise from natural causes to organize the cultural order. Himself “too masculine . . . [for] female writing,” Johnson declared women in turn too feminine for masculine pursuits; “‘Sir,’” he famously addressed Boswell, “‘a woman’s preaching is like a dog’s walking on his hinder legs. It is not done well; but you are surprized to find it done at all’” (Boswell, 327).

Perhaps because upright dogs remain relatively rare while more and more women are taking the podium, Johnson’s view that the appurtenances of sex are as distinct as those of species and as surely rooted in biology has lately had to be rethought. The insurgent view that gender is a cultural idea rather than a biological fact shares the ground that it has been gaining with parallel arguments about other identities — of class, of race, of national or religious association. Denaturalizing the character of women is part of a larger denaturalization of all the categories of human character, which emerges as both a social and a linguistic construction.

Implicating literature in the making of society has a reciprocal im-

the critical term that designates sexual identity and its associated characteristics. For as the discussion below will explain, the argument implicit in analyzing literature from a “gender” perspective is that sexual identity is not “necessarily correlated with sex”; in other words, that biological sex does not directly or even at all generate the characteristics conventionally associated with it. Culture, society, history define gender, not nature.

plication *for* literature. If gender is a matter of nurture and not nature, the character conventionally assigned men and women in novels reflects history and culture rather than nature, and novels, poems, and plays are neither timeless nor transcendent. This reciprocal historicizing extends to criticism which comes to read in the character of Hamlet, say, instead of a portrait of universal manhood, let alone of universal humanity, an exceptionally resonant but still particular depiction of aristocratic young manhood in Renaissance England (featuring among other characteristic attitudes, the assumption that young men of the dominant class are universally representative). If literature speaks gender, along with class and race, the critic has to read culture and ideology. It turns out that all the time writers and critics thought they were just creating and explicating transcendingly in a separate artistic language, willy nilly they were speaking the contemporary cultural wisdom.

Not all critics have been as delighted as Molière's Monsieur Jourdain to learn that the way of speaking they took for granted constituted a statement in itself. The aspiring bourgeois thought his conversation much enhanced by its participation in the ambient culture, but some critics fear that talk of gender, as of class and race, will rather diminish literature. They worry that reading literature in relation to society will, by rendering literature's meaning more particular, reduce it *to* the particular. But it is possible to argue just the opposite, that uncovering the social and cultural assumptions of literary language actually complicates reading. For when we take fictional characters to be universal, they subsume the particular traits and attributes of different kinds of people — as a character like Hamlet does when he is taken as embodying the general human condition. Ironically such transcendent characterization works reductively to submerge the complexities of human difference; while in order to explicate the particular, a critic needs to focus precisely on distinctions and qualifications, on the complexities of human difference. Against the fantasy of transcendence, a criticism conscious of literature's and its own sexual politics affirms the permanent complexity of engagements and interactions.

This should suggest what it is useful nonetheless to say explicitly: that speaking of gender does not mean speaking only of women. As a critical term "gender" invokes women only insofar as in its absence they are essentially invisible. And it brings them up not only for their own interest but to signal the sexed nature of men as well, and beyond that the way the sexed nature of both women and men is not natural but cultural. In this sense, gender may be opposed to sex as

culture is to nature so that its relation to sexual nature is unknown and probably unknowable: How, after all, do we speak of human beings outside of culture? From the perspective of gender, identity is a role, character traits are not autonomous qualities but functions and ways of relating. Actions define actors rather than vice versa. Connoting history and not nature, gender is *not* a category of human nature.

Uncovering the contingencies of gender at the heart of even the most apparently universal writing has been a way of challenging the view that men embody the transcendent human norm, a view to which the first objection was that it was unjust to women. But in proposing gender as a basic problem and an essential category in cultural and historical analysis, feminists have recast the issue of women's relative identity as equally an issue for men, who, upon ceasing to be mankind, become, precisely, men. Thus gender has emerged as a problem that is always implicit in any work. It is a quality of the literary voice hitherto masked by the static of common assumptions. And as a critical category gender is an additional lens, or a way of lifting the curtain to an unseen recess of the self and of society. Simply put, the perspective of gender enhances the critical senses; let us try to see how.

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is a man's book about a boy, and just as likely an object of gender criticism as writing by or about women. Mark Twain's best-known work is a classic or . . . canonical text. This story of an adolescent who undergoes a series of trials on the rocky road or the river voyage to adulthood is a central work in the American tradition, a work that articulates and helps define dominant values and ways of seeing the world. Such works and their central characters claim to represent the universal human condition. So one prevailing critical view that *Huckleberry Finn* is "a great book" because it champions "the autonomy of the individual" (Smith 1958, xxix), assumes that "the individual" is generically a self-sufficient being able to define himself autonomously, meaning apart from society. Note that in the preceding sentence one could not substitute "herself" and "her" nor indicate that the representative individual is black or Asian because specifying an alternative and subcategorical sex or race invokes limits on individual autonomy. On the other hand, not to specify alternative categories of identity subsumes them in the white male norm, when it does not exclude them from it altogether. Huck's individuality transcends all the particularities of his class and generation.

A little like Hamlet, except that Huck is no prince but in fact the

antithesis of a prince, occupying the very bottom rung of his social ladder. It has been suggested that in Hannibal society Huck ranks below the slaves, who at least play a useful role in the community, whereas "poor white trash" like him are at best useless and most times a nuisance. The son of the town drunk, almost illiterate, dirt-poor, and innocent of ambition for either education, property, or shoes, Huck seems to lack all conventional worth, but this only makes him the better embodiment of individual values. For Huck's missing social attributes and graces dramatize his separation from society and make him an emblem of individualism. Huck personally transcends his abjection (as Hamlet, the unsuccessful prince, his loftiness). From the beginning of the story, he is headed out. He starts by leaving the home of the Widow Douglas and the village itself. This places him on the threshold of more radical departures, as Huck opposes his universal principles to the fundamental tenets of both his class and his race. He achieves heroism by renouncing genteel hypocrisies as Hamlet does by denouncing the rot at the Danish court.

For all its systematic extraction of its hero from social categories and roles, however, the novel actually reaffirms one category and role, paradoxically appropriating its terms to depict transcendence. By rejecting the false values of his society, Huck eventually becomes a man of integrity; and whatever else in our culture defines a man's integrity, not being feminine, being un- and even antifeminine is key. In fact Huck's first passage, once he leaves village society, takes him into a limbo of gender.

Huck's voyage out begins on the island in the middle of the Mississippi where he comes upon the runaway Jim. Having joined forces, the outcast boy and the escaped slave deem it prudent before proceeding with their journey to freedom to see whether they are being pursued. Huck will have to return to the shore to reconnoiter and, to avoid being recognized, he will need a disguise. A deep bonnet such as is worn by local girls seems ideal for the purpose. Dressed therefore in bonnet and gown, Huck sets off, concentrating hard on remembering that he is a girl. Fortunately the first house he comes to is inhabited by a stranger in town, a middle-aged woman to whom, introducing himself as Sarah Williams, he spins a tale about a sick mother for whom he is seeking help. As they sit comfortably chatting, the woman mentions that the entire neighborhood is astir with rumors about Huck Finn's disappearance and probable murder. At first, she reports, everyone assumed that the murderer was the runaway Jim but now folks are inclined to believe that it was Huck's own "white-trash"

father, who has also disappeared. Still, a reward of \$300 has been posted for the slave's capture and the woman herself has great hopes of earning it; for she has seen smoke rising on the island where in fact Huck and Jim are camping, and that very evening her husband is to row out there.

Agitated by this ominous news, Huck cannot keep still and, as an occupation appropriate to his disguise, attempts to thread a needle. His hostess, who is named Judith Loftus, watches his maneuvers with astonishment and a short time later, on the pretext that she has hurt her arm, asks him to throw a lead weight at a rat that has been poking its nose out of a hole in the wall. Naturally Huck throws brilliantly, whereupon she retrieves the weight and tosses it to the seated boy who claps his knees together to catch it. With this, Mrs. Loftus announces triumphantly that she has not been fooled: He is not a girl but a boy apprentice run away from his abusive master. Huck breaks down and confesses to this new identity and, giving him much good advice, Mrs. Loftus sends him on his way. In a panic, he hastens to the island, and arriving, calls out to Jim to hurry, they have to get off at once: "There ain't a minute to lose. They're after us!" [81].

This last exclamation deserves all the critical attention it has received. "They" Huck cries to Jim are "after us," but of course "they" are only after Jim. Indeed, in racial and even class terms, "they" include Huck, who at that moment disengages from all his kind to identify with a black man and a slave. Earlier, hearing about the magnificent sum to be had for turning Jim in, Huck was so far from being tempted that Judith Loftus had to explain to him that although her neighbors no longer thought the slave was a murderer, the money was incentive enough to continue the chase. "'Well, you're innocent, ain't you!'" [77] she teases Huck who at this moment has become literally innocent, redeeming himself in these passages from sins of racism and of greed.

This episode culminates Huck's moral and political ascension; he will not rise higher in the rest of the novel but rather slide back. There is an archetypal, typological dimension in this situation of a boy discarding his given identity and recreating himself more just and good. But what is the role in all this of the feminine disguise? Why and to what effect does Huck pass through the crisis of rejecting his born identity dressed as a girl?

We should note first that the plot does not require this costume. Since Mark Twain makes Judith Loftus a stranger, there is no reason why Huck cannot pretend to be a runaway apprentice in the first

place. One explanation could be that turning Huck into a girl gives Twain the opportunity to ridicule femininity — something he does intermittently throughout the novel, making fun for instance of female sentimentality in the tear-filled story of Emmeline Grangerford, young poetess, deceased. But if this was the inspiration for the masquerade, it effectively backfired. For the ridiculous figure in the Loftus kitchen is Huck himself, while in lecturing him on his ineptitude in impersonating the feminine, Judith effects a temporary but nonetheless radical reversal of the very nature of gender. What should have been Huck's saving grace, that he is too boylike to imitate a girl successfully, cannot redeem his discomfiture; when Mrs. Loftus dispatches him at the end of the scene she is clearly skeptical about his ability to get on even in masculine guise: "If you get into trouble you send word" she offers, "and I'll do what I can to get you out of it" [80]. On the strength of this short-lived turnabout, womanhood even develops a maternal aspect all but unknown in the rest of Mark Twain's writings. "Keep the river road, . . . and next time you tramp, take shoes and socks with you" [80] must sound an unaccustomed note to a boy whose experience runs more commonly to scolding aunts than to nurturing mothers.

The motherly Judith Loftus is in command of the scene and of Huck; but most unexpectedly, she is in command of herself, making this explicit when she takes command of femininity itself. In explaining how she has penetrated Huck's disguise, through his inept rendering of girlness, she analyzes feminine behavior as if from outside, herself standing apart as much "the individual" as Huck is when he stands apart from his "white-trash" ignorance, or Jim, briefly, from his "black" superstition. For the interval from that speech to the end of the chapter a few paragraphs later, conventional femininity is a social construction equally with the novel's account of organized religion or the cavalier ethic.

As a social construction femininity has its standard parts. A girl, Judith Loftus tells Huck, can thread a needle, she spreads her lap to catch things which thus land in her skirt, and she cannot throw straight. The precision with which Mrs. Loftus describes how a girl does throw necessarily implies equal knowledge of how boys do it. She can detail femininity because she sees it as a role, which must mean that masculinity is also a role. The logic of this is that anyone who knows the rules can play, boy or girl, man or woman. For instance she has just been playing, pretending not to be able to hit the

rat, thus *pretending* to be feminine in order to force Huck to reveal his masculinity. In her criticism of Huck's feminine acting, Judith Loftus labels it just that, acting.

The chapter's opening inaugurates the notion that femininity is a situation by placing us on its threshold: "'Come in,' says the woman, and I did" [75]. No sooner has Huck taken on the role with the name Sarah Williams than he gets his first lesson in how to act as a girl. For while he had meant just to gather information and leave, the good Mrs. Loftus will not hear of the ostensible Sarah's wandering the roads at night alone. To be a girl is to be unable to move about freely: Sarah-Huck will have to wait for a man, Judith Loftus's husband, to return and escort her-him. In this scene displaced to the wings, men wait to act out their parts. Although Mrs. Loftus is the one who has discovered Jim's hiding place, properly, she will send her husband, "him and another man," to effect the capture.

The culminating moment in the reversal of femininity from nature to nurture — from sex to gender — comes toward the end of the episode when after warning Huck not to go among women pretending to be one of them Judith adds kindly, "'You do a girl tolerable poor, but you might fool men, maybe'" [80]. This is the final blow not to male authority but to the authority of gender itself, for if women recognize femininity better than men that can only mean that femininity is a performance and not a natural mode of being.

Sexual orthodoxy is not self-contained but dualistic, a matter of relations. This interdependence between self-definition and the definition of the opposite gender is especially true for women, whose more restricted horizon is entirely spanned by masculinity. Taken to be rooted in biological propensity, femininity reveals itself, as it refers, first or at least equally, to men, who represent its reason and its rationality and who possess the key to its code as an essential component of their masculinity. If women are born and not made women, men should be the best judges of femininity.

When Judith Loftus tells Huck that women will recognize his absence of femininity but that he may fool men, she posits, on the contrary, a femininity that, instead of reflecting order, generates it, whose original impulse is therefore not biology but ideology. The femininity Mrs. Loftus deploys in restricted travel, sewing, knitting, and maladroitness represents its oppositional relation to masculinity as a series of actions that are anything but spontaneous or natural. These actions enact a stance that is willful if not consciously willed. Bring the thread to the needle, she instructs Huck, not the needle to the thread;

hold your arm “as awkward as you can” and above all “miss your rat about six or seven foot” [80]. Missing rats is what a girl *does*. Let us say the obvious: When it is an action rather than an accident, missing implies the theoretical ability to hit. Nor can we interpret this to mean that, as a boy, Huck can choose to hit the rat or miss him but that a girl could only miss, because all of it, the way to hit and to miss and above all the necessity of choosing between them, is being explained by a woman who controls the entire situation: “I spotted you for a boy when you was threading the needle; and I contrived the other things just to make certain’” [80].

Femininity, as Judith Loftus has here defined it, is something women *do*, a composite activity made up of certain acts they perform well and others they as skillfully perform badly, or perhaps most skillfully not at all. Masculinity is the equal and opposite condition: She spots Huck for a boy when after lacking the skill of threading needles — threading is what men skillfully do-not-do — he reveals that he usually wears trousers by clapping his knees together to catch the ball. One suspects, it is true, that sharp-eyed Mrs. Loftus would spot a girl in boy’s clothing more quickly than her husband would, but this does not negate the implication of her warning to Huck, that gender is nurture rather than nature. In part this is because the performance of femininity includes observing more shrewdly, especially the performance of gender.

But the other reason for her likely superiority at catching out fraudulent boys as well as girls lies precisely in her ideological stance. At the close of the preceding chapter, before the trip to the village, Jim criticizes Huck, who is practicing walking about in a dress: He “said I didn’t walk like a girl; and he said I must quit pulling up my gown to get at my britches pocket” [74]. Jim’s instructions are negative, as is the entire disguise, whose intent is to hide and not to project, to conceal “real” masculinity. What Huck learns from Judith Loftus, however, is that concealment is not the issue but projection: projection, meaning construction. Extrapolating, masculinity also becomes a construction and in renaming Huck a boy, Mrs. Loftus returns his masculinity to him not in the old absolute terms but as *his* way of performing.

It is this experience, effectively a revolution in the way Huck defines himself in the basic area of gender, that sets the stage for the revolution to come in his sense of himself in the equally basic area of race. The move involved in both transformations is the same, from essentialist to cultural and political definitions of gender and race, from

nature to history. When Huck, in that epiphanic cry “‘They’re after us!’” casts himself as an object of his own race’s persecution, he does not mean that he now considers himself black. Rather he has come to see that in the cavalier South the blackness of an enslaved black man refers not to a set of inherent attributes but to a situation, to an oppression such as can also torment a poor white boy.

The sequence — Huck and Jim on the island as white boy and escaped slave; Huck pretending to be a girl in the Loftus kitchen; Huck and Jim fleeing the island to escape white slavers — places the middle episode in the role not only of catalyst but of mediator. It is in the context of a temporary displacement of his gender identity, and of the questions Judith Loftus raises about gender identity as such, that Huck moves permanently into a new social identity in which, resuming an unquestioned maleness, he questions the other conventions of his culture far more radically than he ever has before. At the moment when he associates himself fully with Jim, Huck Finn and his story might be said to touch bottom in the contemporary culture and ideology and to spring back to an antipode that marks not transcendence but the outer limits of the culturally and ideologically imaginable.

Such moments are not easily sustained. Many students of Mark Twain and *Huckleberry Finn* have noted that after a dazzlingly iconoclastic first half or so, the novel retreats toward a disappointingly conventional conclusion; and that on the way, with Huck’s complicity, the character of Jim is returned to a black stereotype. The subject here, however, is not *Huckleberry Finn*, but the uses of gender as a critical term that can illuminate not only the literary treatment of associated topics like romantic love and the family but thematic and formal concerns that are not obviously involved with sexual identity at all. We could have fruitfully examined the treatment of the Widow Douglas, for instance, or of Emmeline Grangerford and the contemporary tradition of women’s writings which Twain mocks through her, and related these examinations to the novel as a whole. But the issue of gender arises in the Judith Loftus episode in a more generally paradigmatic way, at once overtly, in that Huck pretends to be a girl, and as a deep structure whose ramifications Twain himself may not have fully understood.

These ramifications have to do with the overall theme of the early part of the novel which traces Huck’s passage out of his society into a liminal state in which not only his moral philosophy but his very identity is in flux. It is no coincidence that he enters into a state of aggravated mutability by stepping into the woman’s sphere of Judith Loftus; nor that her exposition of the inessentiality of femininity im-

mediately precedes his extraordinary identification with a black slave. In this process, race and sex are not wholly analogous: Huck emerges from the encounter with Judith Loftus, indubitably and forever, a boy, whom one cannot imagine actually identifying with a girl, only protecting her. Conversely, the final lesson he learns from Judith Loftus is not the one she means to teach him, since she herself is hell-bent on catching Jim and returning him to slavery. But these complications are precisely the point in manifesting the fundamental or axiomatic character of gender in the organization of thought and writing: By plunging Huck into the deepest possible limbo of identity, this very brief eclipse of his masculinity, even rectified by his inability to maintain the pretense, opens him and Mark Twain's imagination to rethinking the basic principles of personal identity and social ideology both. Through Judith Loftus, the novel speaks as it could not through Huck himself. It is as if the novel itself had found a female voice and the language to say things its male vocabulary could not articulate and therefore did not know, or did not know it knew. The term "gender" can empower criticism in the same way, enabling it to pose new questions and thus discover new levels of interpretation. In reading the Judith Loftus episode, raising gender as an issue affects one's interpretation in a widening circle that finally encompasses the whole novel. At the center of the circle, the very fact of Huck's female impersonation becomes charged with a new energy when it is seen not so much to conceal or erase his masculinity as to render it problematical. So long as masculinity is considered literally organic, Huck's calico gown and bonnet could at the extreme signify his castration without thereby raising questions about masculinity as such. Castration as we know, is the classic stuff of anxiety, but it also allows for total reassurance. In that regard, the episode is entirely reassuring: Huck fails at being a girl because he is so thoroughly a boy. When the issue, however, is not the possession of masculinity but, precisely, its provenance — whether biological or ideological — no such reassurance can be had. On the contrary, the more explicitly the characteristics of masculinity are described, directly or as the reverse of Mrs. Loftus's account of femininity, the more they become contingent, possibly arbitrary, and certainly disputable.

With Huck sitting in Mrs. Loftus's kitchen got up like a girl, nothing any longer is given, anyone can be anything. The certainty of gender provides for literature generally and for the rest of *Huckleberry Finn* an anchor for the kinetic self. Lifting that anchor even briefly accentuates all the instabilities of Huck's other identifications. The early part of the boy's journey out of town moves toward an indefinite hori-

zon. How indefinite or infinite a horizon is dramatically evident in the explosion of his cry “They’re after us!” Joining an escaped slave in the first person plural, he has traveled a cosmic distance which the additional critical perspective of gender helps both measure and explain by bridging the opening of the chapter, in which Huck passes into the world apart of women, and the close, which propels him right out of his culture and society. In the end, while discarding the accoutrements of “white-trash” ideology, he will certainly retain the panoply of conventional masculinity. But the fact that he has temporarily put off even that gauges the radical reach of his alienation, and plumbs the depths of its terrors.

In other words, gender is both an embedded assumption and functions as a touchstone for others. It is logically impossible to interrogate gender — to transform it from axiom to object of scrutiny and critical term — without also interrogating race and class. The introduction of gender into the critical discussion multiplies its concerns and categories by those of historiography to produce a newly encompassing account of cultural consciousness that is also newly self-conscious.

From the perspective of gender, then, a critic sees both deeper and more broadly. But the view may also appear more obstructed, exactly the enhancement of critical vision seeming to hinder it, or to interpose a new obstacle between critic and text. In analyzing the ways gender concepts complicate the Judith Loftus episode, this discussion has invoked some issues and ideas which Mark Twain probably did not consciously consider when he wrote it. In a much later story, describing a boy and girl each of whom behaves like the opposite, Twain expresses a clear understanding that gender is a matter of ideology. Or as he puts it more vividly: “Hellfire Hotchkiss [the girl] is the only genuwyne male man in this town and Thug Carpenter’s [the boy] the only genuwyne female girl, if you leave out sex and just consider the business facts” (cited in Gillman, 109–10). Indeed “the business facts” of sexual identity is about as good a definition of gender as one could offer and Judith’s exposition of how girls are made girls and boys boys can certainly be read as an early draft. But within *Huckleberry Finn* itself there is little to indicate such understanding and in fact evidence to the contrary. When the narrator describes women directly they seem rather the incarnation of femininity than its practitioners, innately either sentimental sillies like Emmeline Grangerford or, like the Widow Douglas, pious hypocrites. On the whole in this story, being a woman is not a proud thing.

That Judith Loftus is anomalously admirable is not a problem but that we have read her as defining herself and the scene she dominates

in terms for which there seems to be no other reference in the book could be one. The apparent absence within the text of these critical terms suggests that the reading has introduced its own notions into the writer's world. One of the ways the term "gender" alters the entire enterprise of criticism is by responding positively to such suggestions, though in relation to a revised understanding of the interactions between reading and text. Because an ideology of gender is basic to virtually all thought while, by most thinkers, unrecognized as such, gender criticism often has a confrontational edge. One has to read for gender; unless it figures explicitly in story or poem, it will seldom read for itself. On the other hand "interpretation" is an ambiguous word meaning both to translate and to explain. Literary interpretation does both inextricably, and when critics limit themselves to the explicit terms of the texts they read their interpretations can be more congenial yet not less (re) or (de)constructive. They also interpret who only think to explicate. Literary criticism involves action as much as reflection, and reading for gender makes the deed explicit.

The exhilarating discovery of Molière's bourgeois gentleman, that when he talked he talked prose, has a counterpart in the rather inhibiting epigram that when you speak you have to use words. The term "gender" in literary criticism refers to a set of concerns and also to a vocabulary — what Mark Twain might have called a business vocabulary — that contributes its own meanings to everything that is said or written.

Suggested Readings

No short list of titles can do justice to the rich variety of recent works in gender criticism. Moreover, for an understanding of the general significance of the term it seems as important to develop a sense of its possibilities as to explore these individually in depth. The following are five anthologies that among them offer a wide survey of the field and can provide an excellent introduction to it.

Christian, Barbara, ed. *Black Feminist Criticism*. New York: Pergamon, 1985.

de Lauretis, Theresa, ed. *Feminist Studies, Critical Studies*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986.

Hull, Gloria T., Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds. *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*. Old Westbury, NY: Feminist, 1982.

Keohane, Nannerl O., Michelle Z. Rosaldo, and Barbara G. Gelpi,

eds. *Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982.

Miller, Nancy, ed. *The Poetics of Gender*. New York: Columbia UP, 1987.

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FREDERICK CREWS

Walker versus Jehlen versus Twain

Frederick Crews (b. 1933) is professor emeritus of English at the University of California, Berkeley. He received his B.A. (1955) from Yale University. After receiving his Ph.D. (1958) from Princeton, he began teaching at UC Berkeley, where he has remained ever since. Crews is well known for both his early efforts to develop an effective psychoanalytic literary criticism (*The Sins of the Fathers*, 1966) and his later repudiation of psychoanalysis (*Out of My System*, 1975; *Skeptical Engagements*, 1986). His other books include *The Tragedy of Manners* (1957), *E. M. Forster: The Perils of Humanism* (1962), and *The Critics Bear It Away* (1992). *The Pooh Perplex* (1963) is an entertaining and instructive send-up of the various modes of literary criticism current at the time of its publication. This is the first publication of this essay.

The preceding essays by Nancy Walker and Myra Jehlen both constitute responses not just to *Huckleberry Finn* but to a general dilemma facing feminist critics of American fiction. The dilemma was