In Bad Faith: The Dynamics of Deception in Mark Twain's America by Forrest G. Robinson (review)

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destination by locating a text's meaning in its genesis rather than in its final aesthetic realization. One may likewise wonder whether Robertson's self-avowed attempt to recast Kafka in terms of nineteenth-century models of narrative fiction, his ultimate recourse to authorial intention, and his ardent desire to unravel Kafkan paradox and contradiction, might have, in the final analysis, precluded a fuller appreciation for Kafka's quintessentially modern exploration into the post-Nietzschean problematic of a decentered existence of proliferating interpretations.

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FORREST G. ROBINSON. *In Bad Faith: The Dynamics of Deception in Mark Twain's America.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986. 255 p.

I agreed to review this book in good faith, but that may really have been done in bad faith for as I went along I found I had little heart for doing it, maybe never had much heart for doing things like it, sustained a lifetime of doing such by occasionally revealing the follies — call it bad faith — of others still undeceived as to the worth of what they were doing. On the other hand, I may just be tired, or maybe vexed with current literary criticism's paranoid stance: that unknown to me serious and sinister things are going on in books that must be revealed for my own good, or maybe I'd just rather re-read *Huckleberry Finn* than read about it.

But before trying to explain my own bad faith, let me give the thesis of this book and its use of bad faith. As the author puts it, his concern is with "bad faith as it manifests itself in two novels by Mark Twain — how it works, how it connects with race — slavery, how it figures in the telling of the stories, and how it has worked to shape the popular reception of those most familiar American 'classics' " (13).

"Bad faith" is explicitly defined early in the book "as the reciprocal deception of self and other in the denial of departures from public ideals of the true and just" (2). Later that definition shifts to "a frequently benign cultural phenomenon involving the acquiescence in manifest departures from law and custom. Bad faith features the deception of self and other in the denial that such departures have occurred. . . . Mark Twain's failure to recognize in himself and in Tom what he angrily condemns as hypocrisy in the citizens of St. Petersburg is evidence of his entanglement in the dimensions of bad faith that he deplores" (211-12).

There is a confusion here which needs facing. Public ideals of the true and just are not the same as law and custom. As regards racism and slavery in Mark Twain's St. Petersburg, both were supported by law and custom, whereas what Professor Robinson has in mind are departures from and hypocrisy about public ideals of the true and just. The piling up of evidence of Tom Sawyer's bad faith is convincing; how could it not be, since a large part of it — more to my mind than Professor Robinson allows — was by Mark Twain's design. As to Mark Twain's bad faith, that seems to me a greatly worked over topic of which Van Wyck Brooks' *The Ordeal of Mark Twain* is the most conspicuous example.

This clarification helps explain my own feelings of bad faith in writing this review. That is, I am in the act of doing it denying to myself that I am departing from public ideals of the true and just by engaging in literary criticism. I am not departing from the laws and customs of my academic St. Petersburg, though

my doing it is indeed submerged in the larger consensus — namely that I and everyone else in English departments should be doing it. Within the literary culture which surrounds me I think there is a fair amount of bad faith of this kind.

But there is another kind of bad faith. That stems from the current literary criticism, of which this book is an example, which leans heavily on sociology, Marxist thought, deconstruction, all aimed at unmasking the deceptions that authors — that *texts*, for *authors* and *literature* are suspect terms in this criticism — practice on a public. In such criticism one kind of bad faith arises from ostensibly departing from traditional practices while denying that such departures do not constitute, in Gerald Graff's phrase, "literature against itself." Another kind is in denials of "departures from public ideals of the true and just." These are of labyrinthine complexity ranging from the public's naive self-deception that there is a "true and just" to the critic's self-deception that the true and just resides in exposing that the true and just doesn't exist.

Now all this could have been said in simpler terms, as simple as the author's sentence: "Something is not right in *Huckleberry Finn* and we know it" (241). The author's familiar, partly concealed, purpose is then to tell how Mark Twain should have written the novel could he have but shaken off his bad faith. I am being unjust to the author, for I think he may at times read Mark Twain's books for simple pleasure. On page 175, for example, he remarks, "The irony here is perfectly delicious."

I find it also ironic that the earnest literary critic, despairing of a world free of racism and slavery, purports to become engaged by embracing a socially engaged literary criticism that exposes other writers' evasion of social engagement. The bad faith arises from not recognizing how absurdly distanced from social engagement, how subservient to academic laws and customs, literary criticism is. By comparison, Mark Twain's evasions seem trivial, his glimpses of the true and just more to be trusted than the critics' revelations of the true and just that he somehow missed.

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SUSAN J. ROSOWSKI. *The Voyage Perilous: Willa Cather's Romanticism.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986. 284 p.

In *The Voyage Perilous*, Susan J. Rosowski discusses Willa Cather's major works of fiction in the context of her views on art and the artist. Rosowski links Cather with the late eighteenth-century literary historical movement that reacted against the "dehumanizing implications of the scientific world view" and with British romanticism in particular. Cather centered her attention on the power of the creative imagination "to transform and give meaning to an alien or meaningless material world" (x). In the first half of her career, Rosowski argues, Cather saw the world as dualistic, polarized into the spiritual and physical. It was the artist's task to bring the two together. Bartley Alexander's (*Alexander's Bridge*) failure was that he could not do this, but Cather's three strong heroines of *O Pioneers!*, *The Song of the Lark*, and *My Ántonia* accomplish it. Claude Wheeler in *One of Ours* cannot integrate the spiritual and the physical either, and even the artist-priest, Godfrey St. Peter (*The Professor's House*), suffers from a "lapse in perfection" (131) that leads him into "the tragedy of irresolution" (159).