The Meaning of "Conscience": An Interpretation of
Mark Twain's "The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival
of Crime in Connecticut"

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1

Mark Twain's "The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival
of Crime in Connecticut" (hereafter "The Carnival of Crime")
is a story written in 1876, the year of the publication
of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and also the year in which
Twain began Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, which was
to be issued in England in 1884. According to Everett
Emerson, it "was inspired both by the author's experiences
and the treatment of morality and conscience in a book
he had been reading, William E. H. Lecky's History of
European Morals, which became one of his favorite books."\(^1\)
The narrator of "The Carnival of Crime," a prosperous
and famous writer, tells a story about his own conscience,
a harsh accuser of his misdeeds, who appears as a strange
dwarf.

One day the narrator receives a letter from his aunt
that informs him of her coming to his house "this very
day...by the morning train."\(^2\) She is, as he puts it,
is the person he loves and honors most of all except his
family, and once was the only one that could stir his
"torpid conscience into faint signs of life when she touched upon" his habit of smoking, his "pet vice" (305, 306); but he has recently found that he can be "absolutely, adamantly indifferent" to her pleading with him to quit smoking. The narrator, thinking "the one alloy that was able to mar my enjoyment of my aunt’s society was gone," is so glad at her letter that he says to himself, "I am thoroughly happy and content now. If my most pitiless enemy could appear before me at this moment, I would freely right any wrong I may have done him." (306) At the moment enters the dwarf at the door of his room.

The dwarf, who will later prove to be the narrator’s own conscience, has an appearance appropiate for his "torpid" conscience, "shriveled, shabby ...not more than two feet high" and of "about forty years old," a deformed figure but with "a sort of remote and ill-defined resemblance" to himself. The resemblance between them can be found not only in the dwarf’s appearance but also in his bad behavior and way of speaking—a tone of voice and a drawl, which are of the narrator’s own. The pygmy appears as the narrator’s double.

In their dialogue, the dwarf rehearses the narrator’s misdeeds and bitterly accuses him of them. For instance, he refers to a tramp who has come at the narrator’s door to beg food only to be turned away by him; and to a poor young woman, a would-be writer, whose manuscript the narrator as a famous writer, has refused to read. These events
remind him of those thoughts which engenders remorse in
him. For too bitter an accusation shouts the narrator
to interrupt his double: "'Oh, peace! peace! peace! Blis-
ter your merciless tongue, haven't all these thoughts
tortured me enough without your coming here to fetch them
back again!'"(310) Yet, the dwarf, who can penetrate
even the narrator's thoughts, goes on accusing. Wondering
who this Satanic accuser is, the narrator is infomed that
the accuser is his Conscience. At the moment, he springs
at his Conscience, who has long been his tormentor, to
"wreak a deadly vengeance on" him(312), but in vain; his
Conscience can move as quickly as lightning. Then, the
part of their dialogue continues until the arrival of
the narrator's aunt.

This part of the dialogue shows the relationship
between the narrator and his Conscience, and that of man
and his conscience in general. The narrator or every
human being is a "slave" who meekly suffers from remorse,
the pang of the lash which his conscience as a "master"
gives him.(312,313) As an example, the narrator's Con-
sience refers to "a man of a peculiarly sensitive nature,"
who "had accidentally crippled a mulato baby"; the man
could not endure the remorse charged upon him by his con-
sicence and "blew his brains out," though "the child was
perfectly well again in three weeks."(317) Similarly,
for the narrator himself, his Conscience is the "most
pitiless enemy," who announces, "It is my business --and
my joy—to make you repent of everything you do."(318)

Having thus disclosed his character, the dwarf tells about his deformed appearance, and then, about some of the other consciences he knows in answer to the narrator's question. He explains the reason why he came to have such a figure like "a mildewed monkey" as follows:

"Some of us grow one way and some the other. You had a large conscience once: if you've a small conscience now I reckon there are reasons for it.... You see, you used to be conscientious about a great many things: morbidly so, I may say. It was a great many years ago.... I took a great interest in my work, and I so enjoyed the anguish which certain pet sins of yours afflicted you with, that I kept pelting at you until I rather overdid the matter. You began to rebel. ...I began to lose ground, then, and shrivel a little--diminish in stature, get mouldy, and grow deformed...."(319)

As the narrator's Conscience says, every man has his own conscience that has grown in a different way from other's: for example, the narrator's neighbor Hugh Tompson's conscience, who once "was eleven feet high and of a faultless figure," is smaller than "a cigar box"(321); Tom Smith's conscience "was thirteen inches high, and rather sluggish, when he was two years old," but "is thirty-seven feet"
now; and a conscience of the narrator's aunt "lives in the open air altogether, because no door is large enough to admit her."(322) When the dwarf speaks of a conscience of a publisher who stole some of the narrator's sketches, the narrator's aunt just comes into the room.

Then, she begins to accuse the narrator of his misdeeds. Her accusation gives him "a splintering pang of guilt"(323) and makes him feel heavy-hearted, which starts to affect his Conscience; his body is drooping forward, begins to sway heavily back and forth, and finally falls from the bookcase he perches on to the floor, where he falls asleep. In an instant, the narrator catches his Conscience, a "lifelong foe by the throat"(324) and tears apart and murders him; a deed that frees the narrator from the pang of conscience to start his career as a criminal in Connecticut.

In a word, "The Carnival of Crime" is a story of one man's transforming into another man: a prosperous and famous writer, the protagonist, who has been tormented by the pang of conscience, as the narrator claims, becomes a criminal "whose life-conflict is done, whose soul is at peace," and "whose heart is dead to sorrow, dead to suffering, dead to remorse; a man WITHOUT A CONSCIENCE!"(325) The protagonist's "watchful gaze," and his "breath
...coming in short, quick gasps" for an "exitement...almost uncontrollable"(323), and his voice which becomes into "a hoarse whisper"(324), all the changes that appall his aunt in the scene of his murder of the dwarf, remind us of that of Dr. Jekyll's transformation into Mr. Hyde.

Mark Twain refers to "The Carnival of Crime" in his notebook as "an attempt to account for our seeming duality --the presence in us of another person; not a slave of ours, but free and independent and with a character distinctly its own." Of course, the dwarf, the protagonist's Conscience is that another person in him, and the person is, as I have examined, the protagonist's double. Concerning "duality," Karl Miller argues as follows:

"Duality" is a word which means that there are two of something, and which has also meant that some one thing or person is to be perceived as two.... Duality has said, of each of the pairs envisaged in its second sense, that the component parts may complete, resemble or repel one another. Such parts are partners, or emenies. Twain's use of duality is in the second sense of Miller's definition of the word.

The protagonist and his double, the dwarf, resemble and repel, but complete each other. Only "a sort of remote and ill-defined resemblance" to the protagonist can be found in his double's appearance, but the dwarf's attitude
and his drawling way of speaking in a certain tone and intonation are so much of the protagonist's own that he blushes to the roots of his hair. The protagonist tries to repel this embodiment of a bad side of his character, who tortures the protagonist ceaselessly with the pang of conscience. Finally, he succeeds in sweeping away his tormentor by murdering him, but then, he can no longer be what he used to be. For he loses his Conscience, a counterpart of his dual self. In this sense, they complete each other.

Thus, the protagonist's murder of his Conscience, a measure for him to free himself from his tormentor, seems to be a success, but it is the deed that reduces his complete self into incomplete one; namely, the deed that transforms himself into another man, or an incomplete being for an individual person. After such transformation, remorse vanishes from the protagonist's heart eternally, but he himself vanishes at the same time. Therefore, the protagonist's murder of the dwarf can be considered as his self-destruction; the dwarf, who has been evoked by the protagonist's unconscious calling his "most pitiless enemy," then, seems to appear as his doppelgänger to foretell his death.

As is told by the dwarf, every person has his own
conscience, whose appearance and stature are appropriate for the person's character: Hugh Thompson, whose conscience is so small that he can sleep in a cigar box, is one of the smallest and meanest men in the narrator's neighborhood; Robinson, "a good fellow," has a conscience, who is "under four and a half feet high," and "is a brunett now, but still shapely and comely" (321); the narrator's aunt, an embodiment of morality, has a conscience with too large a figure to live in any house; the narrator, a practicer of many vices and misdeeds, has a torpid and deformed conscience. The more stately grows man's conscience, the more strict morality he has; a stately conscience controls and leads a man into morally good deeds with a compelling power stronger than that of a poor conscience.

Moreover, conscience's control of a man is in a dual way. The narrator complains to his Conscience about the duality as follows:

"...Three days before I had fed a tramp, and fed him freely, supposing it a virtuous act. Straight off you said, 'Oh, false citizen, to have fed a tramp!' and I suffered as usual. I gave a tramp work; you objected to it--after the contract was made, of course; you never speak up beforehand. Next, I refused a tramp work; you objected to that. Next, I proposed
to kill a tramp; you kept me awake all night, oozing remorse at every pore. Sure I was going to be right this time, I sent the tramp away with my benediction; and I wish you may live as long as I do, if you didn't make me smart all night again because I didn't kill him...." (317)

To "encourage vagrancy" by helping a tramp as well as to kill him is a misdeed against good citizenship for the narrator's Conscience who proclaims, "It is my business ...to make you repent of every thing you do." That is to say, his conscience functions as an adjustor of his deeds to keep him in harmony with the code of the community, in which he must be a good citizen as a well-known writer.

The code is common to all the members of the community, but the degree of their observance of it is different. The difference is expressed by that of their conscience's statures: a conscience of the narrator's aunt, an embodiment of morality, is larger than any house, while that of a publisher, who stole some of the narrator's sketches, is so small that a microscope can not make it visible. To what degree man accepts and observes the code, therefore, his way of acting in the community, depends on his conscience. Conscience, then, functions in every man as a point of contact between his inner self and the community, the outer world.

This argument can explain the reason why the narra-
tor's Conscience, the dwarf, is invisible to all but the narrator himself. Conscience is within every man, but it functions as such a place in him at his personal level different from other's. Therefore, both the narrator's son and his aunt, who are aliens to the narrator in that sense, cannot understand the level at which his Conscience is functioning, and cannot see the dwarf before their eyes.

In "The Carnival of Crime," there seem to exist three different characters who all come from one matrix and have the same memories: a prosperous and famous writer with a "torpid conscience," a dwarf or the writer's Conscience, and a criminal as the writer who has lost his conscience. The matrix is the writer, who is remembered by the narrator as an owner of the torpid conscience. The writer, of course, can be identified with the dwarf, his another self, but cannot with the criminal. For, although the person is the same, his loss of a conscience has transformed his inner self. As I have argued, the writer's Conscience controls him as an adjustor of his deeds and even makes his character itself. In other words, his conscience is the thing that defines his identity.

Conscience is within man's inner self in its natural state, but for the protagonist, the writer, it must be
outside his inner self so as to embody it. For the embodiment of his conscience makes it visible and tangible, and enables him to murder it; namely, to remove it out of his inner self eternally. The wholeness of the inner self is a condition of suffering for him. Therefore, the protagonist's removal of his conscience can be regarded as his escape from such a condition of suffering in his inner self.

Like the protagonist of "The Carnival of Crime," Huckleberry Finn escapes from being civilized, a condition of suffering for him. For Huck, to be civilized equals to lose his identity as a child of freedom and independence. While the protagonist of "The Carnival of Crime" has come to abandon his identity to escape from his suffering self, Huck is to continue his adventures of escape down to the Mississippi, and farther to the Territory to maintain his identity.

NOTES


2) The Writings of Mark Twain, Author's National Edition (Grosse Pointe: Scholarly Press, n.d.), vol.XX, p.306. Subsequent citations are to this edition, and the page numbers will be parenthetically given in the text.
3) This statement induces the argument that a man who has been transformed into another cannot narrate a story of himself before transformation, and that the story narrated by such a man is not authentic. The problem of the first person narration is so complicated that I have not solved it yet. It is one of my future subjects to deal with. Of course, the narration of a man without a conscience is ethically doubtful, but I will simply take the story for a record of the narrator's memories with consistency and sequence, and proceed with my argument in my present essay.
