Louis Suárez-Potts

"Unhomely Pleasures: Dislocation in Twain's Works,"

Beginning in the late mid- to late 1870s, industrialism in the U.S. produced a new class of men constituted by transient workers and unemployed. They were often romantically represented by bourgeois writers as existing in an unknown and mysterious "trampland." Jack London, whose association with the middle classes was always something of a performance, described trampland, in an article in *Cosmopolitan*, as a "realm as unexplored as fairyland" and just as invisible to the uninitiated[1]. Other ethnographic, journalistic, and literary writers used similar language to emphasize the alien remoteness of the world the tramp inhabited and the difficulty of understanding the tramp. This ignorance engendered at once a literature of personal accounts and romantic speculations, so much so that writings on tramps, whether ethnographic, literary, or journalistic, constituted a veritable genre. In the UK, a similar genre investigating how the other half lived, had existed for some while. American accounts, however, focused more on men's stories. In the US, it was almost entirely men who tramped. Trampand was for men.

In this paper, I examine the first-person accounts of tramp life by Josiah Flynt, who wrote several criminological works based on his own irresistible tramp urges, and Mark Twain, whose famous children's work, *The Prince and the Pauper* has, at its center, an Unhomely romance of the road between a young boy and an older, more experienced man, the dispossessed knight, Miles Hendon, who teaches the young Edward about the road while the two seek to regain what is theirs. Both works, the criminological and the literary, present the unknown field of tramping within the circumference of the law; and both present that same field as a paradoxical place of escape.

The use of Flynt is fairly self-explanatory. But why *The Prince and the Pauper*? Published in 1881 and written while he was working on *Huckleberry Finn,* the novel forms an unrecognized companion piece: an ostentatiously children's novel concerning

about two dislocated children, uncannily alike, the one a pauper infatuated with the book romance of princes and kings, the other a prince and also infatuated with the romance of princes and kings: himself. An adult guide and savior, who himself must be saved, completes the tableau. Identity, maturation, responsibility—all the things that normally inhabit the text of children's books (the moral which Twain publicly disdained in *Huck*)--are the obvious points of *The Prince and the Pauper*, and their very obviousness an the general critical agreement that this is what the books is in fact about, represent a kind of hermeneutic relief from the hypercanonical ritual reading of *Huck Finn.*

So, it's almost with a heavy heart that in this paper I try to complicate the simple story of boys by suggesting a cultural backdrop that has been evidently willfully ignored, overlaying the also-ignored story of tramping. I refer to the masculine erotic quality that runs through the texts, *The Prince and the Pauper* and Flynt's in particular. Bourgeois writing on tramps, even the most ethnographically inclined, located the tramp within a more or less dangerous erotic. Thus, in Flynt's fairly extreme and unusually and alarmingly graphic accounts, the tramp is a dangerous criminal not just because he looks not unlike regular people and is thus a secret threat—he's not what he seems, he can disappear in the night along with your things--but because he also seduces young boys, both in the sense of raping them and in the sense of seducing them to his way of life. Other writers were more subtle, and saw in the person of the tramp and in the liaisons he formed with boys not the pure threat of pederasty but the far more complicated anxious appeal of a educative pedophilia. The Ragged Dick stories, in which an older man's affection proves to be the ticket for success is one model. Twain's *The Prince and the Pauper* is another. But where Alger's stories skirt the extralegal and occupy themselves hardly at all with the governmental, by which I mean the operations of the state, its legitimacy and authority, both Twain's and Flynt's accounts are intensely interested in the relation between the masculine erotic and the governmental; between the romance of government and the government of romance.

I want to turn to Josiah Flynt's representations of the tramp; I will then conclude with a brief reading of Mark Twain's more sympathetic account of tramp desires. Why did Flynt tramp? It is a fair question, and one that that he poses to himself repeatedly and answers excessively. Depending on his book and audience, he tramped not because he needed work but because he was psychologically compelled to. Or, as he says in what is probably his most famous modern-day account of tramps (his books sold in fact quite well at the time), Appendix B to Havelock Ellis's 1897 *Sexual Inversion*:

> "I have made a rather minute study of the tramp class in the United States England and Germany, but I know it best in the States. … My purpose in going among them has been to learn about their life in particular and outcast life in general. This can only be done by becoming part and parcel of its manifestations."
> (Appendix B, "Homosexuality Among Tramps," 252)[2]

To learn of tramps—to study them scientifically—one must become a tramp. The explanation is bogus, of course: Flynt lived among the tramps because he desired to.. But this ethnography, replete with extensive glossaries (a kind of tradition for this sort of writing) was hardly distinguishable from Lumbroso-like police guides. No coincidence: Flynt loved the idea of being a cop and undercover betrayal, and he more than once betrayed his erstwhile friends and threw his chips in with the police and railway companies, and happily became an undercover operative, tramping in the name of the law and indulging a voyeuristic appetite as a gesture of science and government.

The point of the appendix--coming after Ellis's sympathetic account of sexual inversion, is to shed light on "situational homosexuality," the sort one might find among sailors and prisoners and, as it happens, tramps: environments where women are not present. But if Ellis's account of inversion is generally sympathetic, Flynt's account of tramp homosexuality is anything but friendly—" Boys are the victims of this passion"--

and his reports vary from seduction scenes to quite graphic accounts of rape. But how does the tramp get the boy to go with him?

> The tramps gain possession of these boys in various ways. A common method is to stop for a while in some town, and gain acquaintance with the slum children. They tell these children all sorts of stories about life "on the road", how they can ride on the railways for nothing, shoot Indians, and be "prefeshunnels" (professionals), and they choose some boy who specially pleases them. By smiles and flattering caresses they let him know that the stories are meant for him alone, and before long, if the boy is a suitable subject, he smiles back just as slily. In time he learns to think that he is the favourite of the tramp, who will take him on his travels, and he brings to plan secret meetings with the man. The tramp, of course, continues to excite his imagination with stories and caresses, and some fine night there is one boy less in the town.
>
> (Ellis, 253)

What comes across most clearly in this scene of seduction, and what seems to be the key to it, is the *affection* the tramp displays for the boy. The tramp offers what the working-class boys on whom the tramps “preyed” seemed to lack: a kind of love. The boy is led to believe that he is special, and that his lot with the tramp would be special, filled with Tom Sawyer-like adventures. The tramp, however, wants the boy only for his sexual purposes; to be, as it were, not free but a sex slave (Flynt goes into considerable detail here). The seduction is also an induction: Eventually, Flynt tells us, the boy is so taken with the life of the tramp that he, too, becomes one of them and goes on to seduce new members--young boys--into the cabal of tramps. Children leave with the tramp because he promises fantasy. In what we may see today as only initially bizarre, the tramp figures here the romantic, the fantastic.

Trampland is exciting for Flynt and Twain and others because it allows for what is otherwise impermissible. And that which is impermissible is both the pedophilic relationship between the older tramp and younger boy and the camaraderie, repeatedly described by writers, among tramps. The "normal" is suspended in favor of a kind of fantasy. At the same time, tramping exists self-consciously within a bracketed domain: the governmental, personified by the Pinkertons, the railroad cops, the law, is never far from the tramp. Flunt's presshun may take the child to neverland but adult accounts of the tramp represent him as much in flight for the sheer pleasure of it as from the inescapable law. In all accounts, the normal obeys the law of genre and returns, strengthened. In this way, tramping is made a safe fantasy for normal people.

Twain's *The Prince and the Pauper*, written at a time when millions of men were on the road because of repeated economic panics, and at least fifteen years before Flynt's judgmental account, illustrates that relocation into the fantastic and the sanctioned return to the normal. Tramping lies at the heart of the novel. Thus, the young prince, Edward, who is ejected from the royal palace after exchanging clothes with the pauper, Tom Canty, tramps because he is forced to by the ogre-like John Canty—Tom's dad--who mistakes him for his raggedy son. In his own flight from the law for the murder of a priest, Canty takes the young prince to the roving gang of tramps in which he himself had been "trained" as a vagabond criminal. Once with the tramps, Canty hopes that the boy—in fact, the young prince—will "relearn" the duplicitous ways of the successful tramp which he seems so egregiously to have forgotten. The drama of *The Prince and the Pauper* thus lies less with the pauper adjustments made by Tom Canty, who inhabits Edward's rightful place, and strives to make England a more just place for the poor, than with the peril of losing Edward to the tramps.

The central relationship in the book is between a character a lot like a tramp, Miles Hendon, and the young boy Edward. It is not between the two boys. Twain does not scorn Edward's savior, whom Twain describes as a "fantastic figure" out of

romances, and also very threadbare. The middle son of minor baronet, Miles is a dispossessed and dislocated small-time aristocrat seeking to regain his fortune, or failing that, to wander the world with his young charge, whom he considers crazy for claiming to be king and demanding, implausibly, obeisance.

Their relationship begins with a gesture of indulgent sympathy and strength on the part of Miles for Edward:

> "Poor little friendless rat, doubtless his mind has been disordered with ill usage. Well, I will be his friend; I have saved him, and it draweth me strongly to him... I will teach him, I will cure his malady; yea, I will be his elder brother, and care for him and watch over him; and whoso would shame him or do him hurt, may order his shroud, for though I be burnt for he shall need it!"
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> (90)[3]

Edward's character, his training, his helplessness, all inspire Miles's love. But what seems to "draw" him most to Edward is his own saving of Edward, that is, his own romantic role in Edward's life *as* savior. In this role, he will be an "elder brother" and Miles's love for Edward is thus the seemingly innocent love that an older brother might have for a younger. But the explanation of fraternal love does not encompass what Miles feels at the end of the book, when a "a writhing, struggling jam of howling and hurrahing people," a "mass of humanity" (247, 248) gathered on London Bridge for the coronation of the new king (Tom, impersonating Edward) separates the two friends, and forces Miles yet again to look for the boy because he loves him:

> ...sooner or later, he should find his poor little friend, sure; and the mangy mob would be entertaining itself with pestering and aggravating the boy, who would be proclaiming himself king, as usual. Then Miles Hendon would cripple some of those people, and

> carry off his little ward, and comfort and cheer him with loving words, and the two would never be separated any more.
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> (278)

Miles's love for Edward is both touching and a little strange; the intimacy that he desires with Edward, which nowadays would strike one as suspect, is nevertheless one that is meant to protect Edward.[4] If Miles earlier had meant for his role to be pedagogical, as well as protective, here it seems that it is merely protective. As protector, he can "comfort and cheer him with loving words" and ensure that Edward stays the uncorrupted child he seems to be. And as child who *needs* such protection, Edward is innocent: too innocent not to proclaim his identity, too innocent not to think that what he does is always right. The relationship is thus motivated by the protection of Edward's innocence, and is "saved" from depravity by the innocence that Edward bears and Miles protects. Protects from the "pestering" crowd that necessarily forms around Edward because of his woeful and attractive innocence and that would destroy him for being so mad as to claim superiority over and difference from the crowd. But the content of what Miles protects is interesting. For he ends up preserving the illusion of power that Edward declaims, the illusion, that is, of the child having the power over the man: that he is a prince, a king. Edward's apparent lunacy thus becomes a sort of pretext for imagining an inversion of power. Edward may not be king, but it is Miles' desire that he treat the boy as if he were. And because Edward *is* in fact king, Miles logically is doing nothing more than what he ought to as a baronet and is protecting his liege, the king, the body of the government.

Yet the reality of Miles' act, at least at first, is that he saves Edward for the road: Miles' effective home. From Miles' perspective, he will humor Edward his fantasy, which the road allows, but the truth of it lies in the road. And this context clarifies some of the elements in the relationship between Miles and Edward. Despite the insistent respectability of Miles's relationship with Edward, it nevertheless echoes what writers on

tramps and tramp lore in the last third of the century would describe as that between a "jocker" or "profesh" and a "preshun": as that between an an older man and his lover.

For the most part, both in this and other novels and in his letters and other published work, Twain scorns the tramp, whom he identifies, at best, as a mountebank or confidence man; not as a pederast. Calling himself a tramp, as in the 1880 *A Tramp Abroad*, is a coy affectation, as well as an ironic commentary about the nature of his work, telling tales and traveling to stave off the creditor. For Twain, tramping was also something of an adventure middle-class men could undertake, as a sort of play: Think of his attempt to tramp with Aldrich around this time. Twain, I suggest, knew about tramps, their rhetoric, and even their masculinist culture. And he plausibly knew, too, that not all tramps are the same, that, as with Alger's stories, tramp relationships ca. 1880, could be productive for both the man and the boy. It is unlikely, that is, that Twain was ignorant of the sexual relations, especially of the pedophilia, for which tramps were, apparently, well-known.

The novel was not received as scandalous at all. In fact, it was lauded as an exemplary children's story. If the affectionate force of the story is, as I've been suggesting, predicated on a pedophilic erotism, that erotism does not breach decorum. Why not? In part, I would argue, because although Miles is like a tramp in being shiftless and homeless, he is most *not* like a tramp in being able to claim the barest thread of the aristocracy, that is, in being, like Edward, an agent of the governmental. As someone who *claims* to be a baronet (we don't know that he is for real, but Twain doesn't let us really believe otherwise) who is now living like a tramp (penniless, threadbare, a vagabond ruffler), Miles never threatens the status quo; in fact, the opposite, he seeks to restore it, and despite his imprisonment, his flogging, his maltreatment, never gets upset, outraged, or unhappy about the system that so maltreats him. After all, it may one day treat him well. Thus, despite their vagabond wandering and the time they spend in prison for imposture, the two are never condemned for being the same as the mountebank rufflers Twain so harshly savages. In

fact, our sympathy for Miles *grows.* Indeed, because of Miles's protection, Edward is able to return to the throne.

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[1] *The Road.* 1907. In *Novels and Social Writings.* Ed., Donald Pizer. New York: The Library of America, 1982; 69.

[2] Ellis, Havelock and John Addington Symonds. *Sexual Inversion.* London: Wilson and Macmillan, 1897; further references are to this text.

[3] Twain, Mark. *The Prince and the Pauper.* 1881. The Mark Twain Library. Eds., Victor Fischer and Michael B. Frank. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983. Further references in the text are to this edition.

[4] In his controversial essay "Mark Twain and Homosexuality," Andrew Hoffman argues that Mark Twain may have had romantic, if not homosexual relations with men early in his life—and later, too.