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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Virtues of the Vicious: Jacob Riis, Stephen Crane, and the Spectacle of the Slum* by Keith Gandal

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Huck and Jim's arguments. Her analysis is shrewd, quite on target. Even better is her reading of Jim's situation while Huck is involved with the Grangerfords: having patched up the raft, Jim "now wants to go with [Huck and return to the river] and risks his life for certainty. In the face of violent melodrama, the quiet heroism at the periphery is all but invisible" (88).

Much of the exploration is both engaging and persuasive. It is considerably less so in the treatment of the evasion chapters, which nearly all readers find a distinct letdown. Chadwick-Joshua's effort to put the best face on both Huck's and Jim's words and deeds in the evasion is, I'm afraid, well-meaning but unsuccessful.

In the face of the attacks on *Huck Finn* in *Satire or Evasion?: Black Perspectives on "Huckleberry Finn,"* teachers of Mark Twain's novel will be grateful for this admiring analysis. But one wonders how Chadwick-Joshua would have treated the buffoon-like, racist portrayal of Jim in a dissecting room (found in the recently discovered opening half of the manuscript) that Mark Twain had the good sense to omit from his published text. This passage was first published in the *New Yorker* magazine and later in an edition of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* that is labeled "THE ONLY COMPREHENSIVE EDITION." The very fact that Mark Twain wrote this passage is troublesome.

Though this reader was eager to be sympathetic with *The Jim Dilemma*, I found, unfortunately, problems with the book. In the first place, there is no identification of the edition of the novel being quoted, though there are page references. (Apparently it is the first edition, or, rather, a facsimile of it.) Can Jim be properly referred to, as Chadwick-Joshua does, as "Twain's spokesman" (128)? Is there evidence for the bold assertion that "The influence of Twain's style reveals itself in Harper's *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted*, Hopkins's *Contending Forces, A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*, and [Anna Julia] Cooper's *A Voice from the South*" (57)? When was Phillis Wheatley's poetry "popular" (64)? A word of explanation for Mark Twain's "rejecting the Cairo crossover" (67) would have been useful, as would a reference to the recent scholarship on when *Huckleberry Finn* was written.

These flaws (and there are others) should not, however, prevent those who teach Mark Twain's novel from reading this significant book. It will prove useful for its perceptive readings of Jim's role before the evasion chapters.

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***The Virtues of the Vicious: Jacob Riis, Stephen Crane, and the Spectacle of the Slum.* By Keith Gandal. New York: Oxford Univ. Press. 1997. viii, 206 pp. \$49.95.**

History-minded scholars of literature and culture have grown used to treating morality as a purely instrumental strategy employed by self-interested groups in the struggle to define "us" and gain advantage over "them." That approach

flattens our understanding of ethics as a deeply held organizing principle that shapes structures of feeling and aesthetics as well as political or social action. Keith Gandal suggests that if his original, compelling book “makes a methodological contribution to American Studies or the study of realism, it is to rethink morality and to reintroduce this term into the discussion” (161). He has done just that in showing how Jacob Riis and Stephen Crane helped set new patterns in Americans’ imaginative responses to industrial urbanism. Examining the ways in which representations of the urban poor gave form to conceptions of “the relation one ought to have with oneself and others” (7), Gandal shows students of realism and the American city how to engage the history of morals as something more than a clichéd account of hypocritical middle-class surveillance of the urban poor’s bad behavior. In the process, Gandal offers new ways to read these two authors together and as part of a larger cultural history.

Riis and Crane emerge in Gandal’s argument as transitional figures who negotiate between traditional and insurgent ethics. In Riis’s “morally schizophrenic” *How the Other Half Lives* (18), an older Protestant tradition of charity writing that regarded the slum as a place of failed character encounters an insurgent ethnographic tradition that recasts the degraded slum environment as a site of touristic spectacle and as a principal cause of disorder conventionally identified with poor people. Riis employs the language of both traditions, but his photographs tip the balance toward spectacle. Crane’s *Maggie*, “a counterdemonstration” (50) against Protestant charity writing and moral order, retells the sentimental tale of a young woman’s ruin with the express purpose of establishing new ethical priorities—ethnographic, psychological, touristic, bohemian—in depicting the slum. Gandal is at his best in explaining Riis’s and Crane’s “strange investment in the tough” (91), in whose criminal activities and stylish habits of personal consumption they detect a complex, raw individuality that might be developed for social good and even emulated by men escaping middle-class constraint. The tough of the 1890s becomes a stock figure still recognizable in our own urban conversation, a cultural and psychological pioneer whose robust drives for “self-realization” are bent by environmental factors into pathologies like “low self-esteem” and a “culture of poverty.”

Tightly focused on two late-nineteenth-century authors, this book only suggests how its argument extends to other writers (from Charles Loring Brace to Kathy Acker), other periods, and the realm of social policy. Even if the suggested extensions remain too schematic to persuade the reader, Gandal has made an original, compelling case for rereading Riis and Crane as exemplars of a new style of reading, writing, and knowing the slum and the spectator’s relation to it.

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