



# Gender Play in Mark Twain: Cross-dressing and Transgression (Mark Twain and His Circle Series)

*Linda A. Morris*

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Huckleberry Finn dressing as a girl is a famously comic scene in Mark Twain's novel but hardly out of character—for the author, that is. Twain “troubled gender” in much of his otherwise traditional fiction, depicting children whose sexual identities are switched at birth, tomboys, same-sex married couples, and even a male French painter who impersonates his own fictive sister and becomes engaged to another man.

This book explores Mark Twain's extensive use of cross-dressing across his career by exposing the substantial cast of characters who masqueraded as members of the opposite sex or who otherwise defied gender expectations. Linda Morris grounds her study in an understanding of the era's theatrical cross-dressing and changing mores and even events in the Clemens household. She examines and interprets Twain's exploration of characters who transgress gendered conventions while tracing the degree to which themes of gender disruption interact with other themes, such as his critique of race, his concern with death in his classic “boys' books,” and his career-long preoccupation with twins and twinning.

Approaching familiar texts in surprising new ways, Morris reexamines the relationship between Huck and Jim; discusses racial and gender crossing in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*; and sheds new light on Twain's difficulty in depicting the most famous cross-dresser in history, Joan of Arc. She also considers a number of his later “transvestite tales” that feature transgressive figures such as Hellfire Hotchkiss, who is hampered by her “misplaced sex.”

Morris challenges views of Twain that see his work as reinforcing traditional notions of gender along sharply divided lines. She shows that Twain depicts cross-dressing sometimes as comic or absurd, other times as darkly tragic—but that even at his most playful, he contests traditional Victorian notions about the fixity of gender roles.

Analyzing such characteristics of Twain's fiction as his fascination with details of clothing and the ever-present element of play, Morris shows us his understanding that gender, like race, is a social construction—and above all a performance. *Gender Play in Mark Twain: Cross-Dressing and Transgression* broadens our understanding of the writer as it lends rich insight into his works.

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