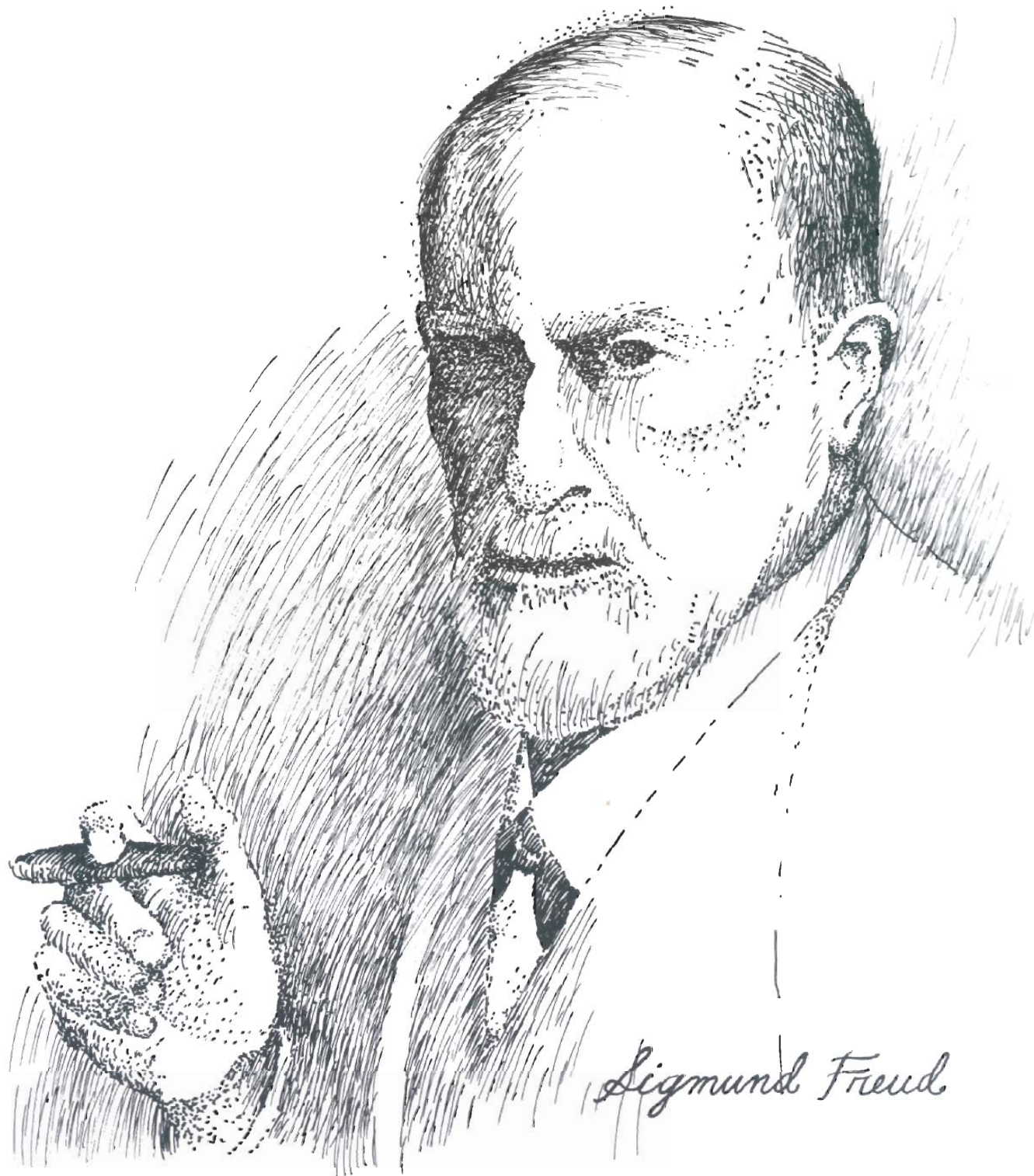


Determinism



Mark Twain, a sophisticated observer of human behavior, wrote a book called *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. The book is about two babies born in the same household on the same day — Thomas à Becket Driscoll came into the world as the heir of the Driscoll family, the leading family in the small town of Dawson's Landing, Missouri; while Valet de Chambre was born into slavery by Roxana, a fair-skinned Negro owned by the Driscolls. Thomas' mother died in childbirth, and he was given to Roxana to care for, along with her own child. Because Valet de Chambre's father was a white man and Roxana was light-skinned, her child was quite fair, and Roxana delighted in being told that the two children were equally handsome.

One day an incident occurred which terrified her. She and the three other house slaves were accused of stealing some money. The master threatened to sell all four of them "down the river" — that is, further south, where the treatment of slaves was much less humane.

Roxana escaped being sold, but as a result of this event, she was gripped by a terrifying thought: what if someday the master should decide to sell her beloved Chambers, as he was now called, "down the river"? The thought so agonized her that she decided to drown both herself and her child. Being a proud woman, she regarded it unseemly to be found dead in her work clothes, so she dressed in her best clothing and borrowed one of Tom's gowns for Chambers. After dressing her son in this fine garment, she was amazed to find that the clothing irradiated all difference between the small master and slave.

As a result of this revelation, the idea of suicide was replaced by a more positive one — she would exchange the identities of the children so that her son, being substituted for Tom, could live in safety and nevermore be threatened by the injustice of slavery. Because of the master's involvement in his own affairs, and because the other three house slaves who were familiar with the children, were sold, Roxana was successful in carrying out her plan.

The rest of the story deals, in part, with the way in which the social roles of the two youngsters shaped their behavior: the real master into a slave, and the real slave into a master. As a result of being thrust into the role of heir to a prominent family, Roxana's child became a spoiled, snobbish coward. His vices ranged from treachery to murder.

When Roxana's child was brought to trial for the murder he had committed, the exchange of children was revealed and the real heir was reinstated to his rightful position.

However, Twain paints a sad picture of the real heir's condition. Despite his restored wealth and freedom, the years spent in slavery had a damaging effect — Tom, unpolished and uneducated, was doomed to remain a misfit in a free man's world. Mark Twain seems very aware of the effect of the environment on the shaping of behavior. He explored the idea of role exchange also in *The Prince and the Pauper*, where a poor boy poses as a prince, and a prince takes the role of a poor boy. Twain is of the opinion that training makes a man what he is: a free child raised as a slave becomes slave-like, and a slave raised like a free man acts like a free man.

Since we're familiar with the law of reinforcement, we can imagine how a changling master takes on the personality of a real master:

Small changling master (pounding the table with his grubby little fists): "Gimme eat, gimme eat right now!"

Adults: "Isn't that cute; he sure knows how to get those slaves to move, he's a horn master!"

