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When Mark Twain wrote this in 1898, he was 62 years old and sunk in gloom, his fortune gone and his beloved oldest daughter dead. But Wilson argues that Twain was not simply indulging his grief. Henry Edwards exemplifies the plight of 19th-century rational man lost in the irrational universe. Other similarly "lost" fictional characters include Arthur Pym in Edgar Allan Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838) and Captain Ahab in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851)—all searchers after knowledge of the world.

In "The Great Dark," Mark Twain suggests the inability of reason to comprehend the universe. We humans, Henry Edwards somberly reflects, take great pride in our powerful "mental equipment," but, in lucid moments, "we see that intellectually we are no great things" and that "our best-built certainties are but sand-houses."

Canvas Con Man

"Gilbert Stuart's Portraits of Thomas Jefferson" by David Meschutt, in *The American Art Journal* (Winter 1981), 40 West 57th St., New York, N.Y. 10019.

Gilbert Stuart (1755–1828), the foremost American portrait painter of his day, was something of a con man. One of his victims, writes Meschutt, of the Frick Art Reference Library in New York, was Thomas Jefferson.

Jefferson sat for Stuart several times, the first in 1800 in Philadelphia when he was Vice President. He paid the artist \$100 for an oil-on-canvas bust but never got it. In early 1805, Stuart wrote Jefferson that he was "not satisfied" with the painting, and Jefferson, then President, agreed to sit for him again, in Washington. Stuart did not tell Jefferson the real reason for his request: America's new minister to Spain, James Bowdoin, had commissioned Stuart (who probably no longer had his 1800 Jefferson painting) to make a half-length portrait of the President. Stuart promised to send Jefferson the 1805 work after making an engraving of it.

But only after repeated attempts was Jefferson finally—in 1821—able to get what he took to be the 1805 portrait. Jefferson's daughter, however, reportedly noticed that the paint was fresh when it arrived at Monticello. Historians since have had their doubts, too. The painting Jefferson received is on a mahogany or walnut panel, but Stuart did not begin using wooden panels regularly until 1807, when the Embargo Act cut off the supply of imported canvas. Moreover, the painting's size (26¼ x 21¾ inches) and its impressionistic style link it not to Stuart's Washington period but to his later years in Boston. The work Jefferson got was probably a late replica, hastily painted about 1821.

Stuart kept Jefferson's \$100, but, instead of giving him the 1805 portrait, Meschutt contends, he sold it to James Madison. (Selling a portrait to two different buyers was a bad habit of Stuart's.) Later, the artist sent Jefferson the inferior version. Stylistically, Madison's *Jefferson* is similar to portraits Stuart did of Madison and his wife in 1804;

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the three works are roughly the same size (about 30 x 25 inches), and all are oil on canvas. Madison did not realize the painting had been first sold to Jefferson; Jefferson thought *he* had the original.

OTHER NATIONS

*Argentina's
Ailments*

"The Argentine Pariah" by Charles Maechling, Jr., in *Foreign Policy* (Winter 1981/82), P.O. Box 984, Farmingdale, N.Y. 11737.

Argentina's military leaders have promised a return to civilian rule in a few years, but the road back to constitutional government will be difficult, says Maechling, a Washington-based international lawyer. Three decades of "political chaos and economic mismanagement" and four years of urban terrorism and Army counterterror have brought chronic instability and conflict.

Early in this century, Argentina was the leader of Latin America. Today, it has skilled manpower and ample energy resources; its 28 million people enjoy the continent's highest standard of living and literacy rate. But a drop in gross national product per capita has lowered Argentina's world ranking from 15th to 37th. Inflation started to get out of control during the 1940s. The nation fell into "a banana republic cycle of domestic turmoil punctuated by military coups."

A leader of one military junta, which took over in 1943, was Juan Perón. With his wife, Eva, he revolutionized Argentine politics by building a mass movement based on the grievances of the working class, the *descamisados* (shirtless ones). But Peronist social programs added immense fixed costs to an already shaky economy. Mounting inflation eroded savings and pensions, and, between 1955 and 1966, there were 448 strikes involving a total of more than four million workers.

By the early 1970s, labor-management strife had disrupted the economy. Marxist terrorists began an antigovernment campaign; the result was urban guerrilla warfare. A military coup in 1976 against the ineffectual regime of Perón's second wife and widow, Isabel, had broad support, but the Army then launched a reign of counterterror; at least 6,000, and perhaps as many as 20,000, persons "disappeared."

After the 1980 U.S. election, Argentina's military rulers ended their repression and tried to destroy evidence of past atrocities. More civilian politicians were brought into the Cabinet; an end to the military regime was promised for 1984. But the Army, Maechling says, "faces the dilemma common to all military dictatorships—whether to hang on to power and perquisites at the risk of becoming the focus of the next wave of social and economic discontent or to relinquish them to the same forces that provoked the takeover in the first place."