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Franklin J. Hillson
College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

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The "Private History," Grant, and West Point:
" Mark Twain's Exculpatory Triad

A Thesis

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Author

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Carl Dolmetsch



William F. Davis



Scott Donaldson

ABSTRACT

This essay explores three interrelated episodes in the career of Samuel L. Clemens, "Mark Twain": the writing of his "Private History of a Campaign That Failed," his relationship with General Ulysses S. Grant, and his association with the United States Military Academy. Each element of this triad was responsible for aiding in the self-exculpation of the guilt that Twain suffered in the Civil War. Once exonerated, at least in his own mind, Twain felt free to launch his invectives against imperialistic wars during the last decade of his life.

The "Private History," Grant, and West Point:
Mark Twain's Exculpatory Triad

Samuel Clemens' military sojourn of two weeks in the Confederate forces in Missouri in 1861 is comically described in "The Private History of a Campaign That Failed" (1885). To a great extent this work is a parody of the popular, heroic pieces that appeared in the Century Magazine in a series celebrating the leaders and battles of the Civil War.¹ Much of the "Private History" is misstated, invented, contrived. Indeed, it has only a kernel of truth, but Samuel Clemens did have firsthand experience in the war. He disliked it; he left. Yet, through this crucial conflict, Samuel Clemens sustained a trauma so intense that it lodged in him for a good portion of his adult life. For nearly twenty-five years he refused to say anything publicly about his role in that intestine struggle. He remained silent, seemingly stifled. Finally, in 1885, this trauma was partially vented in Mark Twain's publication of the "Private History."

Though of immense importance, the airing of that disturbing episode in Twain's life was not the only factor in his self-exculpation of deeds done a quarter century earlier. Closely intertwined with the first was his relationship with Grant. By gaining the friendship of Ulysses S. Grant and by securing the rights of publication for the General's Memoirs, Mark Twain received an attributed honor: a soldier

of the South inseparably linked with the military hero of the North. The study of Samuel L. Clemens' "Private History" and his relationship with Ulysses S. Grant as exculpatory factors in the life of Mark Twain are partially examined in Daniel Aaron's The Unwritten War, James Cox's Mark Twain: The Fate of Humor, and Justin Kaplan's Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain. This essay elaborates upon the observations in those works by exploring these two important areas in greater detail and by including a third, highly significant but overlooked, component in probing the enigmatic personality of Mark Twain--his close association with the cadets of the United States Military Academy. Together these three interrelated, mutually supportive, and nearly simultaneous factors provided the liberating elements in the trauma which Twain suffered as a result of his Civil War experiences.

Twain's self-vindication was a gradual process, but was total and absolute. Once completed, in 1885, it freed him to launch his incessant attacks on the imperialistic wars of America and Europe during the last years of the nineteenth and the first years of the twentieth centuries. His avoidance of battle in word or deed during and for some time after the Civil War was later replaced with his conviction to fight determinedly with his pen.

In a personality as puzzling and variable as Mark Twain's, there cannot be a single cause for the trauma or

guilt he suffered in the Civil War. Rather, it was composed of many factors, some more significant than others, which pulled at his delicate conscience. Mark Twain's conscience must be briefly examined in order to comprehend the awesome guilt he incurred in that devastating clash of arms.

As many biographers have pointed out, Mark Twain possessed a deep and highly complex conscience, extremely susceptible to pangs of guilt. Indeed, Van Wyck Brooks in The Ordeal of Mark Twain suggests that Twain was guilt-ridden for most of his life. Although Bernard DeVoto rebuts some of Brooks's conclusions in his Mark Twain's America, both DeVoto and Brooks as well as other scholars agree that Samuel Clemens had an ultra-keen moral sensitivity.

His mother was a devout Presbyterian who had instilled a strong sense of honor and justice in her son during his formative years. He was immersed in the study of the Bible and knew many passages by heart. His notebooks, says Albert Bigelow Paine, overflowed with Biblical references. The Scriptures accompanied him on his 1867 trip to the Holy Land where he purchased a Bible as a gift for his mother. In his youth, he even shared his brother's ambition to join the ministry.² Mark Twain once jestingly remarked: "It was the most earnest ambition I ever had. Not that I ever really wanted to be a preacher, but because it never occurred to me that a preacher could be damned. It looked like a

safe job."³ Twain's moral upbringing was substantial. Perhaps too much so. In the three examples which follow, it seemed Samuel Clemens' moral training had given him an intense, almost suffocating moral accountability.

In March 1847 Samuel Clemens' father died. Young Sam, only eleven, was deeply shaken by the loss. He had never been very close to his father, but he had always wanted to be. Now his last chance had suddenly vanished on that cold day. Twain was dazed with guilt. Albert Bigelow Paine says in Mark Twain: A Biography:

The boy Sam was fairly broken down. Remorse, which always dealt with him unsparingly, laid a heavy hand on him now. Wildness, disobedience, indifference to his father's wishes, all were remembered; a hundred things, in themselves trifling, became ghastly and heart-wringing in the knowledge that they could never be undone.⁴

Six years later Samuel Clemens was again burdened with a heavy conscience. He had given some matches to a jailed, drunken tramp who wanted to light his pipe. Later the vagrant accidentally set fire to his cell in which he was horribly incinerated. Jerry Allen in The Adventures of Mark Twain tells of its effects on the nascent writer:

The fire-etched picture of the man clinging to the bars and crying for his life stayed with

Sam night after night. He could not shed oppressive guilt. Driven by nightmares, unable to live with himself, he put to Henry [his younger brother], whose judgment he held infallible, a supposititious case: Would a boy be guilty of murder who gave matches to a drunken tramp? Henry's considered verdict, assuming the boy knew the tramp to be drunk, was yes.⁵

Five short years later (1858) Henry was killed in a boiler explosion on the riverboat Pennsylvania. Again Samuel was overwhelmed by guilt. He held himself solely responsible for his brother's death, for his brother's presence on the stricken steamboat, for his own absence on that vessel. Dejectedly, he wrote to Mollie, his sister-in-law: "Men take me by the hand and congratulate me, and call me 'lucky' because I was not on the Pennsylvania when she blew up! May God forgive them, for they know not what they say."⁶

His service in the Civil War was not his first encounter with guilt, but it was his most severe. As stated earlier, the cause of Twain's guilt was not a single, isolated factor. The concept of guilt is so nebulous, so complicated, that at least some treatment of this vast subject is necessary. Ludwig Wittgenstein called it a "concept with blurred edges."⁷ Roger Smith in his introduction to Guilt: Man and Society tends to agree but adds: "The idea of guilt...does not lack a center. The basic idea involved

in guilt--the center of the concept, as it were--is that of the boundary, or limit, which is trans-gressed, that is, literally, the boundary which is 'overstepped.'"⁸ Smith elaborates:

To express it in linear dimensions, one can speak of the structural sequence of guilt: a boundary is transgressed, the offender is separated from the rest of society..., various attempts are made...to reassert the boundary, and finally the boundary is either restored or a new one takes its place (reconciliation), and society finds itself at one with the offender (atonement).⁹

But the boundaries of guilt, adds Smith, are "soft, indistinct, muted."¹⁰ Smith's linear depiction is roughly parallel to the Civil War ordeal of Mark Twain. A boundary or, rather, several are transgressed; he leaves and goes West; he makes various attempts to re-establish the boundary (his writing of the "Private History," his friendship with Grant, his association with West Point); he finally gains self-exculpation. What are these guilt-inducing boundaries that Twain overstepped? They are his participation in a disturbing war, his desertion from it, and most important, his killing or alleged killing of an innocent man in that conflict. This last factor combined with the others proved too much for Twain. Shattered, he retreated to Nevada, a

temporary sanctuary. J. Glenn Gray adds in "The Ache of Guilt":

It is a crucial moment in a soldier's life when he is ordered to perform a deed that he finds completely at variance with his own notions of right and good. Probably for the first time, he discovers that an act someone else thinks to be necessary is for him criminal. His whole being rouses itself in protest.... He feels himself caught in a situation that he is powerless to change yet cannot himself be part of.¹¹

The soldiers who respond to the call of conscience, asserts Gray, "find themselves in the most baffling situations."¹² The only thing many can do is to leave the fighting and try to forget. Gray continues: "Not at all certain whether they will later be considered by their own people as heroes or as scoundrels, great numbers find it simpler to ignore the moral problems by thinking of them as little as possible. Better to let the conscience sleep...."¹³ For Twain's conscience, it was a fitful quarter-century rest.

Prior to "The Private History," Mark Twain purposefully abstained from commenting on the myriad issues of this volatile conflict. Unlike other writers, like Whitman in the North and Timrod in the South, he was never moved to write on the holiness or righteousness of this grave contest.

"In none of his sketches during or shortly after the war," says Philip Foner in Mark Twain: Social Critic, "are the issues of the struggle touched on."¹⁴ Somehow, his personal experiences "at the front" and his subsequent unheroic withdrawal to the safety of Nevada temporarily silenced any possible cries he might have made about the war. To be sure, he later "satirized what might be called the social consequences of the War, but resisted the impious and impolitic urge to be openly irreverent about the War itself,"¹⁵ as Daniel Aaron states in The Unwritten War. It was one thing to poke fun at unscrupulous politicians, shady businessmen, and hypocritical preachers, but it was quite another to belittle the holy accomplishments of the military worthies who had saved the Union.¹⁶

Concerning this pivotal clash of arms, Mark Twain remained strangely quiet. Even his biographers skirt the issue. Albert Bigelow Paine's massive four volume work (1912 edition) devotes only six pages to the military experience. Clara's memoir of her father avoids the incident altogether. Brooks, DeVoto, and Kaplan assign very few pages to this critical moment in Twain's life. Kaplan does, however, touch upon the true significance of Twain's "desertion."

Twain's marked silence does not imply that he was completely unaffected by the war. When Foner says that Twain "displayed little interest in the greatest crisis the country

had ever faced, and that he remained indifferent to the vital issues of the war,"¹⁷ he presents only a single side of a multi-faceted problem. It is true, however, that during his five-and-a-half year residence out West as a miner and a newspaper reporter he rarely mentioned it. Indeed, throughout his stay in Virginia City as a journalist on the Territorial Enterprise (September 1862 to May 1864), and in San Francisco as a reporter on the Morning Call (June to October 1864), he strictly avoided public references to the war raging in the East.

Twain's reluctance to comment publicly on the War, the news event in the country, was extremely odd. The Civil War was not limited to those areas in the East. In the forms of celebrations, quarrels, and sporadic bloodshed between non-combatants, it permeated the entire nation. Mark Twain's western years were not spent in a political vacuum. In the Territory of Nevada alone, clashes between the Unionists and the "Secesh," as the secessionists were derisively called, occurred with alarming frequency. On July 21, 1861, only three days after Twain's departure for Nevada, Southern sympathizers in Virginia City were openly jubilant over the outcome of the First Battle of Manassas.¹⁸ Johnny Newman, a saloon owner in that city, flew the Confederate flag over his establishment until threats of bodily harm forced him to haul it down.¹⁹ On November 29, 1861, while Twain was mining in Aurora, the last great outburst of rebel sentiment in the Territory exploded in nearby Carson

City when a "Secesh" killed a loyal Northerner.²⁰ Governor Nye, an ardent Unionist, was nearly convinced that this incident would serve as a catalyst for a general uprising on the part of the Confederates, and immediately summoned troops to ensure order.

Though these events occurred on the periphery of Twain's early experiences in Nevada, he was plunged into the political vortex of these issues when he entered Virginia City in September 1862 to work on the Enterprise. His co-workers and friends represented both sides of the political spectrum. Billy Clagett and Steve Gillis had Southern sympathies, while Joe Goodman and Clement Rice were strongly pro-Union.²¹ The prominent issue of Loyalists versus Copperheads would rumble beneath the surface of everyday life in Virginia City²² until the war's end, even though by 1862 Nevada had a strong Unionist majority and would become the thirty-sixth state two years later. (In neighboring California covert Southern organizations flourished in mining camps and cities, and the fight for Southern dominance of that state did not end until Lee's surrender.)²³ Virginia City had become a haven for Confederates and Secessionists. In 1863 John North, the surveyor-general of Nevada, said: "It has already become notoriously remarked that here [Virginia City] was the great refuge of the Copperheads... coming over the plains from Missouri, and across the mountains from California."²⁴ And these Copperheads were a noisy lot.

Though small in number, pro-Southern advocates stated their opinions openly and boldly. They drank to the health of Jefferson Davis and to the demise of General Grant.²⁵ When inaccurate information reported the fall of Richmond in May 1863, jovial Unionists were convinced that this news would provide the coup de grace to the secessionist spirit. But much to their bewilderment, the Copperheads arrogantly paraded up and down the streets of Virginia City and publicly proclaimed their sympathy with the Confederacy by wagering that the Southern Capital had not been captured by the Federals.²⁶

Pro-Union statements, pro-Confederate declarations and rumors of victories and defeats whirled about the town. But Mark Twain avoided public reference to the War; he remained a political recluse. Instead, he concentrated on amusing stories, local news (shootings, theatricals, billiard matches), and on the bombastic official rhetoric of local politicians, the sagebrush statesmen who took Nevada and themselves too seriously.²⁷ When his boss departed for vacation in the spring of 1864 and placed him in charge of the editorial page, giving him in essence journalistic carte blanche, Twain wrote to his sister Pamela:

I stipulated...that I should never be expected to write editorials about politics or eastern news. I take no sort of interest in those matters.²⁸

Nevertheless, barring "political and eastern news," he still managed to publish fifteen hundred to three thousand articles in the Enterprise.²⁹ Many of these bore the signature of "Mark Twain," the famous pseudonym which Samuel Clemens adopted in early February 1863.³⁰ Initially, there was a distinct line between the "Sam L. Clemens" articles and those of "Mark Twain." The former tended to be straight reporting, analytical and routine; the latter personal journalism, humorous and sensational. The nom de plume designated an invented personality, a mask. The line became finer and finer until the two finally merged. Samuel Clemens was irresistibly caught in the persona of Mark Twain, Twain in the reality of Clemens. Although there has been much debate over the origin of this intriguing pen-name--Mark Twain himself said that he had given the facts of its birth at least three thousand times--the question should not be its etymology, but rather its purpose. James Cox suggests in Mark Twain: The Fate of Humor that "the discovery of 'Mark Twain' in the Nevada Territory in 1863...had quite literally been a way of escaping the Civil War past which lay behind him in Missouri. In effect, the humorous identity and personality of 'Mark Twain' was a grand evasion of the Civil War."³¹ The comic mask of "Mark Twain" provided the author with a clown's status: a person to be enjoyed, but not to be taken seriously. It provided him an immunity, albeit a tenuous one, to his harsh experiences during those

perplexing days in Missouri.

But the striking exception to Samuel Clemens' silence during this period is his letter of September 9, 1862 written to Billy Clagett, a mining companion, just after the Union defeats in the Peninsular Campaign and at the Second Battle of Manassas. This missive, written only a little over a year after his desertion from the Confederate cause, shows his changing sympathies--and his concern. Clemens, like many, believed that the existence of the United States was now mortally threatened. When the news of defeat reached Great Britain, Richard Cobden wrote to Senator Sumner: "There is an all but unanimous belief that you cannot subject the South."³² Indeed, the Confederacy in that golden summer of 1862 was confident that the South could never be conquered. Gustavus Fox, assistant Secretary of the Navy, lamented: "Dark days are upon us. Pope [Union commander at Manassas] ...has been driven into Washington... The rebels again look upon the dome of the capitol...."³³ In notable anguish Sam writes to Billy:

...It appears to me that the very existence of the United States is threatened just now. I am afraid we have been playing the game of brag about as recklessly as I have ever seen it played.... D--n it! only to think of this sickening boasting-- these miserable self-complacent remarks about 'twenty-four hours more will seal the fate of the

bastard Confederacy--twenty-four hours more will behold the United States dictating terms to submissive and groveling rebeldom!'. . . Think of it, my boy--last week the nation were blowing like school-boys of what they were going to do-- this week they are trembling in their boots and whining and sniveling like threatened puppies-- absolutely frantic with fear. God! what we were going to do! and last night's dispatches come to hand--we all rush to see what the mountain in labor hath brought forth, and lo! the armies have fled back to Washington; its very suburbs were menaced by the foe; Baton Rouge is evacuated; the rebel hosts march through Kentucky and occupy city after city without firing a gun. . . .³⁴

Clemens was conscious of the war, agonizingly so. And if he lacked any outward manifestations concerning the struggle, he had them boiling within.

The most direct and complete source of Twain's involvement in the Civil War is in "The Private History" itself. In essence, it took nearly twenty-five years and a major revision before the darker and more developed statement of his military service was published in the Century in December 1885. Many critics, however, view the "Private History" as merely a simple, amusing parody of Civil War veterans'

memoirs. In many ways, it is just that. The antics of these bungling country bumpkins are humorous and completely incongruous in relation to the heroic exploits of the soldiers praised in the patriotic tomes which emerged from both sides in the Civil War. The first comical scene and one which serves as the starting point for a series of hilarious "military" adventures is their initial encounter with the foe:

It was a crucial moment; we realized, with a cold suddenness, that here was no jest--we were standing face to face with actual war. We were equal to the occasion. In our response there was no hesitation, no indecision.... Our course was plain, our minds were made up: We would flank the farm-house--go out around. And that is what we did.³⁵

It was a brilliantly executed night flanking maneuver away from the enemy, and Twain boasted: "we had made our first military movement, and it was a success" (p. 23).

Perhaps the most entertaining of all the episodes in the "Private History" was the misadventure at Mason's Farm. Marching to that "camp" at night (a skill they would never master), the entire company slipped and tumbled "down the hill in a body and...landed in the brook at the bottom in a pile" (p. 29), losing their powder and rifles in the pro-

cess. That calamity served only as the prelude for a far greater humiliation: the attack by Farmer Mason's dogs.

...it was after nine when we reached Mason's stile at last; and then before we could open our mouths to give the countersign, several dogs came bounding over the fence, with great riot and noise, and each of them took a soldier by the slack of his trousers and began to back away with him. We could not shoot the dogs without endangering the persons they were attached to; so we had to look on, helpless, at what was perhaps the most mortifying spectacle of the Civil War.
(p. 30)

These and other comical incidents abound in the "Private History," but as is typical with much of Mark Twain's writing, the humorous anecdote masks the seriousness of his work. These examples show how woefully inadequate these soldiers are for battle--against men or dogs. The war is not all fun and games, as these novice soldiers soon discover. William C. Spengeman in Mark Twain and the Backwoods Angel views this work as "an innocent's progress from romantic illusion to awareness,"³⁶ an extremely accurate assessment. The innocents themselves are clearly a most un-warlike and un-military collection of humanity. They represent "a fair sample" of the volunteers in Twain's company and in other

units during the opening stages of the Civil War. These recruits, some of whom are listed and described in the beginning of the story, stand in marked contrast to the accustomed cataloguing of warriors. Instead of a strong-armed Odysseus or a fleet-footed Achilles, one is presented with Smith, "sluggish" and "homesick," and Jo Bowers, "lazy" and "sentimental." The word "sample" is used in each character introduction, a device emphasizing their commonalty (the folks next door) and the many nameless "samples" destroyed in the war. Even their names--Smith, Stevens, Bowers--are general, non-descript. Average people thrust into war.

The youths' voyage from fantasy to reality is a gradual, grim process. Initially, their spirits are carefree, light; the war is a splendid thing: "the first hour was all fun, all idle nonsense and laughter" (p. 21). But this flimsy enthusiasm quickly wears off: "But that could not be kept up. The steady trudging came to be like work; the play had somehow oozed out of it" (p. 22). With the approach of night, the novice soldiers become filled with despair: "...the somberness of the night began to throw a depressing influence over the spirits of the boys, and presently the talking died out and each person shut himself up in his own thoughts" (p. 22).

Nighttime, paradoxically, proves to be an illuminating factor on their journey to awareness. Darkness reveals to the young soldiers a horrible reality of war--the constant

fear. Daytime, on the other hand, allays their fright, actually blinding them to the truth. For a while. The dreaded fear of night permeates the story. "The long night wore itself out at last" (p. 32) and "Night shut down black and threatening" (p. 34) are only a few of the many references to the unsettling effects of darkness. The majority of their military "engagements" occur at night: the flanking movement, the dog attack, the ordeal at Camp Devastation. After several periods in the field, they begin to see clearly the effects, or rather the indirect effects, of war:

We staid several days at Mason's; and after all these years the memory of the dullness, and the stillness and lifelessness of that slumberous farm-house still oppresses my spirit as with a sense of the presence of death and mourning. There was nothing to do, nothing to think about, there was no interest in life. (p. 33)

Nowhere is the direct effect of the war more vividly and shockingly portrayed than in the killing of the stranger--the ultimate awakening to reality. This scene, like the other significant episodes, occurs at night and is described in a serious, solemn tone. Here Mark Twain abruptly stops his spoofing of the war and the story hastily draws to a conclusion. About half the "veterans," after examining their ghastly experiences in the war, resolve to leave the

conflict. Even the arguments of their peers and the orders of General Harris to stay and fight are unheeded. Speaking for his group, Twain says: "...our minds were made up. We had done our share; had killed one man" (p. 42). The other half of their unit "yielded to persuasion and staid--staid through the war" (p. 41). The ones who leave, it seems, are the true heroes. They make the harder choice--to obey their consciences.

The "Private History" was a story that had to be written. Twain's experiences in the War had been evaded from the very beginning and it was only after nearly a quarter century that he could write this disturbing episode of his life and exculpate himself. William S. McFeely's account of Grant's struggle to write his Memoirs also serves as a remarkably apt expression for Twain's "Private History":

All his life he had struggled to get his story out, to get his life laid out before himself and before the world, so that in some way it could matter. Now--and only now he succeeded.³⁷

Thus, when Twain wrote and published his piece, he had illuminated his guilt to the world. But why should Twain make an attempt at self-vindication as late as 1885?³⁸ He had tried once earlier, namely with his brave attempt in the 1877 "Ancient" speech in Hartford, Connecticut, but that time was too soon to be effective; Twain was not yet ripe.

Two other bolstering exculpatory factors--his relationship with Grant and his association with West Point--were not yet fully developed.

The "Private History" began as a speech in Hartford on October 1, 1877, honoring the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company of Massachusetts, the oldest military unit in the country. It was a patriotic celebration complete with bands, parades, and, of course, patriotic speeches. The speakers on that fall day praised the dedication and courage of this esteemed organization's heroic exploits in the "War of the Rebellion." That is, all the speakers except Clemens. His speech dealt with what he called a forgotten episode in the military history of the United States and of the Confederacy: his service as a rebel soldier.³⁹ "I find myself in a minority here,"⁴⁰ Twain began as he elaborated on the boredom, dissatisfaction, and confusion of his Civil War days. Needless to say, it was not the appropriate speech for the occasion and thoroughly unexpected by the audience. The Boston Evening Transcript reported the next day that Mark Twain's speech at the "Ancients" was rather flat reading, but well delivered.⁴¹ There was frequent laughter, but of a nervous and timid quality.⁴²

This fledgling "Private History" and its mature counterpart share a general outline. A group of Tom Sawyer-like youngsters meet in a secret place by night and form themselves into a military unit with the romantic sounding name

of the "Marion Ranger." Their initial holiday mood is quickly superseded by the monotonous and disagreeable realities of war: the constant marching, the constant rain, the constant fear. Without participating in any military engagement, they disband after two weeks. Each rough outline, however, contains different details and statements. The former consists of a large section dealing with a Ben Tupper, Lieutenant Clemens' insolent Orderly Sergeant, while in the latter Tupper is not mentioned.⁴³ In the first version, the entire Confederate company tramps off for home, deserters all, while in the latter account some leave, some remain, and some die. The 1877 speech remains light and carefree in tone throughout the story, but the 1885 account grows dark and gloomy. The change in tone explodes at the killing scene, an incident omitted in the "Ancient" speech. In fact, in that fledgling work he does not even mention killing anyone.⁴⁴ It would take Twain another eight years before he has the confidence to brave that important episode, an incident, however, of dubious historical validity. Thus, as an historical document the work is unreliable; yet neither is it merely burlesque. "The Private History" is, as Stanley J. Mattson says in "Mark Twain on War and Peace," a story laden with Twain's emotional and intellectual reactions to the war.⁴⁵ James M. Cox adds in "Whitman, Twain, and The Civil War" that "Mark Twain's Civil War was never the historical Civil War but an emotional equivalent of

that war in which Mark Twain was perpetually involved...."⁴⁶

A telling response to the conflict is discreetly found in the title.⁴⁷ It is a private history, the personal account of one man thrust onto the battlefield. The text that follows is apologetic and moderate:

You have heard from a great many people who did something in the war; is it not fair and right that you listen a little moment to one who started out to do something in it, but didn't? Thousands entered the war, got just a taste of it, and then stepped out again, permanently. These, by their very numbers are respectable, and are therefore entitled to a sort of voice,--not a loud one, but a modest one; not a boastful one, but an apologetic one. They ought not to be allowed much space among better people--people who did something--I grant that; but they ought at least to be allowed to state why they didn't do anything.... Surely this kind of light must have a sort of value.

(p. 17)

Twain goes on to mention the emotional ambiguities felt by those along the lower Mississippi:

...there was a good deal of confusion in men's minds during the first months of the great trouble-- a good deal of unsettledness, of leaning first

this way, then that, then the other way. It was hard for us to get our bearings. (p. 17)

This passage sheds light on the uncertainty and indecision which was prevalent in the border state of Missouri and in the North and South in general.

Mark Twain's native state of Missouri presented a unique problem to its inhabitants. The confusion and bewilderment of its citizens were compounded by the fact that Missouri was virtually ruled by a dual government throughout the war. In 1861 Claiborne Fox Jackson, the secession-minded governor, and General Sterling Price, the commander of the pro-southern Missouri State Guard, were involved in intrigues to align their state with the Confederacy. Their plans might have succeeded if not for the resourcefulness and celerity of Union General Nathaniel Lyon. In a scant ninety days he secured St. Louis, chased Governor Jackson and his cohort out of the capital, and checked Price's attempt on August 10, 1861 to recover Missouri at the Battle of Wilson's Creek, the second land battle of the Civil War.⁴⁸ On that date Missouri was forever lost to the South. Undaunted, Jackson maintained a government-in-exile in Arkansas which continued after his death under the leadership of Thomas C. Reynolds.⁴⁹ Reynolds' regime was officially recognized as a member of the Confederacy with senators and representatives in its Congress.⁵⁰ His government never gave up the hope that a large-scale invasion of Missouri

synchronized with a vigorous guerrilla-warfare campaign would pluck that state from the realm of the North and restore it to the domain of the South.

Missouri, in effect, became a splintered state, torn apart by opposing governments, relentless guerrilla warfare, and intense factional quarrels. While many thousands would join both the Northern and Southern armies, a large portion of these would disengage themselves from the contest, their thoughts dazed and tangled. On the other side of the country confusion was just as severe. In Massachusetts Herman Melville would write "Conflict of Convictions," a poem depicting the moral conflict of those in the Union during the early days of the Civil War. In the North as well as in the South men's hearts and minds were divided, confused. And many would leave the fight.

Ella Lonn's Desertion During the Civil War meticulously explores the various reasons for desertion, the paramount one being "ignorance of the real issues at stake."⁵¹ Confusion and vagueness in Mark Twain's home state was rife. Bernard DeVoto adds to this perspective in Mark Twain's America: "The sketch remains a lonely realism about the gathering of the militia clans in the confused days of '61, a perfect expression of Missouri's Civil War."⁵² In Missouri alone 4,410 Confederate, as well as 5,743 Union, soldiers left the ranks during the conflict.⁵³ Indeed, of the hundred thousand volunteers whom Jefferson Davis obtained

in March 1861, ⁵⁴ many--like Twain--trickled away during the very first days of the war. Desertion reached its peak in the winter of 1864-65 and eventually totalled 278,044 for the North and 104,428 for the South.⁵⁵ Thus Mark Twain's exclamation that "thousands entered the war...and then stepped out" is a gross understatement: the moral dilemma and confusion was shared by many. Mark Twain was not alone.

Some, no doubt, were cowards. Some have criticized Twain's abrupt departure from the battlefield as cowardice, pure and simple. In 1940, when a commemorative stamp in Clemens' honor was being issued by the Post Office Department, Congressman Joseph B. Shannon of Missouri said to the House of Representatives:

Colonel Burbridge met them [the Union force], and so did Mark Twain--for a few minutes only. Mark Twain met them; and, as someone said, a Minié Ball came whizzing past his ears, and he started running. He ran; and oh, how fast he did run.⁵⁶

Fred Lewis Pattee, a scholar of American Literature, is very scornful of Twain's war record:

What of Mark Twain during this Gethsemane [Civil War] of his nation, when hundreds of thousands of his generation were dead upon the

battlefields of the South that had been his home? Not a word in all his works concerning the Civil War save a humorous exaggeranza "The Private History" describing his desertion from the colors.⁵⁷

Another critic, Edgar Lee Masters, adds:

During the war thousands of men went west to escape military service. They had no interest in the war or its issues. They wanted gold and silver, land and riches. Mark Twain was one of these....He did not, as many youths did in that state...shoulder a musket to prevent disunion. He was not sufficiently interested on that score. He wanted to travel, to make money.⁵⁸

These critics are wrong, misled. James M. Cox says: "Mark Twain's participation seems at first glance little better than paltry evasion."⁵⁹ The key phrase is "seems at first glance." Closer scrutiny is mandatory. The disjunctive loyalties in his own divided state, in his own divided family, and, most important, in his own divided mind minimize the charge of a cowardly Clemens.

Mark Twain was a mass of chiaroscuro feelings, sentiments, and ideas. He grew up steeped in Southern tradition. Both sides of his family swore descent from cavalier stock: his mother claimed lineage with the earls of Durham; his

father a link to the court of King Charles I.⁶⁰ They were proud of the South, distrustful of the North. But Twain overlooked his "aristocratic heritage," married into a "Yankee" family and lived most of his life in the North. His family had owned slaves and he felt a kinship to the Southern cause, yet he came to loathe slavery and believe in the preservation of the Union. He had early prejudices against Irish Catholics, foreigners, and, of course, Blacks, but he would later become the champion of liberty and justice, defending Blacks, Boers, and Chinese. In 1868 he wrote:

The idea of making negroes citizens of the United States was startling and disagreeable to me, but I have become reconciled to it, and the ice being broken and the principle established, I am ready now for all comers.⁶¹

But in 1861 he could not make up his mind on which side to cast his support. For several months he vacillated between the Union and Confederate causes. That time of indecision, with moral, social, and personal forces tugging at him, must have been excruciating. The opposing lines were not simply drawn between the people of states that seceded and of those that did not.⁶² As Samuel Morison points out in The Oxford History of the American People, there were many inconsistencies:

The Confederate army contained men from every Northern state who preferred the Southern type of civilization to their own; and the United States army and navy included men from every seceded state who felt that the breakup of the Union would be a fatal blow to...democracy. Admiral Farragut was from Tennessee; Caleb Huse, the most efficient Confederate agent in Europe, was from Massachusetts; Samuel P. Lee commanded the Union naval forces in the James river while his cousin Robert E. Lee was resisting Grant in the wilderness.... Three brothers of Mrs. Lincoln died for the South; several kinsmen of Mrs. Davis were in the Union army.⁶³

Samuel Clemens' older brother, Orion, was a staunch Unionist and actively supported Lincoln's policies. But finally the enticement of "The Cause" and the thick "secession atmosphere" (p. 18) on the lower Mississippi swayed Mark Twain: he would become a rebel. A troubled one. To fight for his country against his country⁶⁴ was a disturbing paradox, but to fight for himself against himself was inconceivable. Here was a Southerner, a traveller, a believer in law and order, and, at the same time, a man with "a dislike of authority and restraint,"⁶⁵ deeply opposed to the mechanized violence and killing which being a rebel necessitated.

This last point stands as the fulcrum for Twain's reason to avoid the war--he despised war in general, but, more important, he hated its senseless death. Recalling his childhood soldier games during the time of the Mexican War, he says in his autobiography: "Before I had a chance in another war the desire to kill people to whom I had not been introduced had passed away."⁶⁶ This sentiment permeates the "Private History":

And it seemed an epitome of war; that all war must be just that--the killing of strangers against whom you feel no personal animosity; strangers whom, in other circumstances, you would help if you found them in trouble, and who would help you if you needed it. (p. 40)

His disgust over the irrational extinction of life by wars or feuds or any other mindless carnage has its literary roots in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. There, a treed Huck views the senseless slaughter of two of his friends in the feud between the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons:

It made me so sick I most fell out of the tree....

When I got down out of the tree, I crept along down the river bank a piece, and found the two bodies laying in the edge of the water, and tugged at them till I got them ashore; then I covered up

their faces, and got away as quick as I could. I cried a little when I was covering up Buck's face, for he was mighty good to me.⁶⁷

The pain suffered in Huck is magnified tenfold in Clemens, when, as a member of the Marion Rangers, he participates in firing a fatal volley:

The thought shot through me that I was a murderer; that I had killed a man--a man who had never done me any harm. That was the coldest sensation that ever went through my marrow.... (p. 38)

In a little while the man was dead. He was killed in war; killed in fair and legitimate war; killed in battle, as you may say; and yet he was as sincerely mourned by the opposing force as if he had been their brother. (p. 39)

The death of the stranger was added in the 1885 version and it is relatively unimportant that historically it may not have happened. What is important and what must be remembered was that besides being a soldier Mark Twain was a man of imagination, of deep sensibility. Edward Wagenknecht in Mark Twain: The Man and His Work says that for Twain the impact of hypothetically killing another person was just as severe to his delicate conscience as if it had actually happened.⁶⁸ Albert Bigelow Paine misses the entire significance of this passage by concluding that

The story might have been still better if he had not introduced the shooting of the soldier in the dark. The incident was invented, of course, to present the real horror of war, but it seems incongruous in this burlesque campaign, and, to some extent at least, it missed fire in its intention.⁶⁹

However, real or imagined, Mark Twain killed a man, an innocent person whose death would constantly haunt him:

The thought of him got to preying upon me every night; I could not get rid of it. I could not drive it away.... (p. 39)

And the realization came to Twain that the effect of this senseless death was not isolated. It affected others: "This thing that I have done does not end with him; it falls upon them [his wife and child] too, and they never did me any harm, any more than he" (p. 39). Twain believed in the sanctity of life and seemed to embrace William Blake's credo: "For everything that lives is holy." Twain would later say: "Peace--happiness--brotherhood--that is what we want in this world."⁷⁰ Perhaps the death of this guiltless man was a bizarre sacrifice for the young Clemens. To be sure, the description of the fallen man has allusions to the crucified Christ:

He was lying on his back, with his arms abroad; his mouth was open and his chest heaving with long gasps, and his white shirt-front was all splashed with blood. (p. 38)

The culprit, realizing his guilt, departs and kills no more. "It seemed to me that I was not rightly equipped for this awful business.... I resolved to retire from this avocation of sham soldiership while I could save some remnant of my self-respect" (p. 40). Wagenknecht correctly surmised that Mark Twain was "psychologically unqualified for military life."⁷¹

There are two peculiar items in the "Private History" which further suggest Twain's unsettledness concerning his experience in the Civil War. One is the author's alleged age. He states that he was twenty-four in 1861 when, in actuality, he was nearly twenty-six. By making himself younger than he actually was, Twain seems to imply that he is less accountable for his actions in the war than he might be if he were older. The stupidity and mistakes of youth are a common excuse for discreditable deeds done in the past.

The other point involves Twain's mild self-deprecation at the conclusion of his "Private History":

I could have become a soldier myself, if I had waited. I had got part of it learned; I knew

more about retreating than the man that invented retreating. (p. 43)

It is probably the only instance of Twain making himself the butt of a joke and is therefore extremely odd. He loved to make others the object of his wit, yet became furious when the favor was returned. For instance, when Twain received what he believed to be an authentic German pipe from his friends of the Enterprise, he felt greatly honored and delivered a wonderful acceptance speech, much to the glee of the culprits. However, when he learned that the present was "just as bogus as they make them,"⁷² he silently fumed and "began to pace the floor with his head on his chest."⁷³ The victim of the joke was eventually given a handsome meerschaum pipe, but he would never forget that prank. Twain said in later years that he remembered the imitation pipe far more than the genuine.⁷⁴ He adds in his autobiography: "I have held the practical joker in limitless contempt and detestation...."⁷⁵ But by making himself the point of the joke in the "Private History," he is in a way coming to terms with his ordeal in the war. He and others can laugh at his wayward exploits. The laughter lessens the burden; Twain helps to vindicate himself with a joke.

But Twain would never forget the terror of those days in Missouri. Years later, in 1891, he wrote a letter to an unknown correspondent listing his qualifications as a writer.

First in his catalog was his career as a rebel:

I was a soldier two weeks once in the beginning of the war, and was hunted like a rat the whole time. Familiar? My splendid Kipling himself hasn't a more burnt-in, hard-baked, and unforgettable familiarity with that death-on-the-pale-horse-with-hell-following-after, which is a raw soldier's first fortnight in the field--and which, without any doubt, is the most tremendous fortnight and the vividest he is ever going to see.⁷⁶

Surprisingly, the tremendous aversion that Samuel Clemens maintained for war and killing did not infect his feelings for the military leaders of the Civil War. The victorious generals of the Civil War were honored by a grateful American public in a way that no other members of society were.⁷⁷ Praised in almost every conceivable fashion, they became idolized, worshipped. They were God's instruments, the Saviors, who had rescued the Union and destroyed the evil of slavery. Heroic songs, poems, and stories told of their deeds. Twain eagerly participated in this frenzied display of hero-worship and enjoyed the friendship of such military "celebrities" as Sherman and Sheridan. But it was Ulysses Simpson Grant--the War's supreme soldier--who captured Mark Twain's total devotion.⁷⁸

For Twain and for America, General Grant embodied the characteristics of the true hero: ingenuous, unassuming, ambitionless, but ready to apply his entire energy to secure "for his country whatever objective she should set him."⁷⁹ Twain's reverence for Grant is explicitly stated in a missive to Henry Beecher. It was one of his longest letters and filled with a laudatory catalog of this great warrior's many virtues. "He was," emphasized Twain, "the most lovable great child in the world."⁸⁰ In fact, so complete was the esteem for this Civil War Cincinnatus that his two scandal-racked terms as president were easily forgotten at home as well as abroad. His twenty-six-month world cruise provided a chance for the rest of the globe to share in the adulation of Grant, and from London to Berlin, Peking to Tokyo, Grant, an ordinary citizen at this time, was hosted by royalty, treated like a king. The London Times summed up his fame: "After WASHINGTON, General GRANT is the President who will occupy the largest place in the history of the United States."⁸¹ Unmistakably, Grant emerged the hero of the Civil War and Twain relished the glory which this friendship secured, a relationship immeasurably strengthened by Grant's immense enjoyment of "vices" so appealing to Twain: alcohol, billiards, and cigars. And so intrigued was Twain by the possibility of having faced Grant in battle (they were in the same general area during the summer of 1861) that he tentatively entitled the original version of

his "Private History" as "My Campaign against Grant."⁸²

The Twain-Grant relationship was an odd one. Though they shared some common characteristics, especially in the pleasure of those forementioned "vices," their differences far outweighed their similarities. Twain was humorous and jesting; Grant was impassive and taciturn. A man of little formal education affiliated with a West Point graduate. A Confederate second lieutenant linked with the General of the Northern Armies. A curious combination, to be sure, but at least partially explained by Twain's hero worship of his one-time military adversary. He says in his autobiography:

Unconsciously we all have a standard by which we measure other men, and if we examine closely we find that this standard is a very simple one and is this: we admire them, we envy them, for great qualities which we ourselves lack. Hero worship consists in just that. Our heroes are the men who do things which we recognize with regret and sometimes with a secret shame that we cannot do. We find not much in ourselves to admire, we are always privately wanting to be like somebody else.⁸³

Their friendship spanned not quite six years, from their meeting in Chicago on November 11, 1879 to Grant's death at

Mount McGregor on July 23, 1885. But they were monumental years for Twain. In that brief period Twain would befriend and psychologically conquer his former military opponent and achieve the publishing coup of the decade: the marketing of the Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant. (He would also publish his own "Private History" in 1885.) His relationship with General Grant provided a catalyst to help purge the ordeal he suffered in the Civil War.

The Twain-Grant friendship sprouted its first permanent roots in Chicago on November 11, 1879 at the Grand Reunion of the Army of the Tennessee, Grant's first command. It was the scene of a three day celebration with Grant the focus of wild praise and Twain one of fifteen speakers. Since his return from the Sandwich Islands in July 1866, Twain had developed into an impressive lecturer, becoming one of the most sought after speakers in the country. He had lectured at military functions before, namely at the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company of Massachusetts in 1877, but this particular banquet disturbed him. He was extremely ambivalent about attending this celebration. Contrary to Justin Kaplan's assertion in Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain, Twain did not eagerly accept the invitation to speak at the reunion.⁸⁴ To be sure, a part of him was hoping to go and he even asked William Dean Howells, John Hay, and Joe Twichell, to join in "a descent upon Chicago... to witness the re-union of the great Commanders of the

Western Army Corps,"⁸⁵ but he vacillated in his desires. He continues in his October 9, 1879 letter to Howells: "My sluggish soul needs a fierce upstirring, and if it would not get it when Grant enters the meeting place I must doubtless 'lay' for the final resurrection."⁸⁶

Kaplan views these lines as suggestive of "the almost religious nature of his hero worship,"⁸⁷ but they are more. Much more. By speaking at that reunion, Mark Twain would come face to face with his old nemesis--his Civil War past symbolized by the presence of General Grant. Twain, at least subconsciously, sought a stimulus, a poker to stir up the smoldering ashes of his past. That goad is General Grant, his erstwhile opponent of almost two decades ago in the damp forests of Missouri. Those dormant memories, once agitated and aroused, might be painful, unpleasant. And, as if in need of moral support, Twain once again asks for companionship while tottering between going and staying: "Can you and Hay go? At the same time, confound it, I doubt if I can go myself, for this book [A Tramp Abroad] isn't done yet. But I would give a heap to be there."⁸⁸ This letter reveals Twain's acute unsettledness in this matter, especially since he has not yet been asked to attend and would not be so honored until weeks later.

Several weeks later, on approximately October 28, 1879, the invitation did arrive, but Twain politely said no.

I have been hoping during several weeks that

it might be my good fortune to receive an invitation to be present on that great occasion in Chicago; but now that my desire is accomplished my business matters have so shaped themselves as to bar me from being so far from home in the first half of November. It is with supreme regret that I lost this chance....⁸⁹

This letter was never mailed. Twain reconsidered and sent an acceptance. Perhaps Twain initially felt that receiving the invitation was enough ("my desire is accomplished"). It represented a victory of sorts: the Army of the Tennessee with such luminaries as Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, and Pope politely turned down by a wayward Confederate. But no. Twain realized the magnitude of this confrontation with Grant. He had to experience it personally and he had to do it alone. His letters to his wife convey his intense excitement and his own personal triumph.

Twain's victory over Grant, however, would have to wait three days. On November 11, the first day of the festivities, Twain's characteristic aplomb was jarred. Standing on a reviewing stand with seventeen other dignitaries, in front of thousands of people, Twain was suddenly thrust in front of General Grant by the mayor of Chicago who introduced him. Twain was startled, embarrassed and tried to withdraw to the rear of the platform. He relates this

incident to Mrs. Clemens:

It was dreadfully conspicuous. The General said a word or so--I replied, and then said, 'But I'll step back, General, I don't want to interrupt your speech.'

'But I'm not going to make any--stay where you are--I'll get you to make it for me.'

...Gen. Logan was going to introduce me, but I didn't want any more conspicuousness.⁹⁰

Faced with his former enemy, his past, Twain made a hasty retreat.

The next night at Haverley's Theatre Twain studied his former adversary, and he was amazed that amid all the patriotic rant--the songs, the cheers, the music--Grant remained impassive, immobile: "What an iron man Grant is!" he writes his wife, "...he was under a tremendous and ceaseless bombardment of praise and gratulation, but as true as I'm sitting here he never moved a muscle of his body for a single instant, during 30 minutes!"⁹¹ However, he did respond to the adoration. Twice, at General Sherman's insistence, he yielded to their ovations, rose and bowed to the frenzied crowd. And, much to the glee of Twain, he broke his iron mien for a third time to point out Clemens to General Sherman, "when the house was keeping up a determined and persistent call"⁹² for Twain. Kaplan hits upon the

crux of this night's significance: "The anti-hero vied with the hero, and the hero deferred to him."⁹³ A small victory for Twain.

The climax of the reunion was the Palmer House banquet on November 13. Mark Twain, the fifteenth and final speaker, assigned that honor to hold the audience, began a little after two in the morning. His toast, "The Babies," displayed Mark Twain at his theatrical best. He was in his own element: the experienced showman and the receptive audience. But with the added challenge of a stoic Grant, it developed into a contest: the comic hero against the war hero. Grant had sat stonily through the first fourteen speeches "like a graven image."⁹⁴ But by Twain's third sentence, he knew that he had captured his audience. Exuberantly, he relates the incident to his wife: "...I saw that I had them! From that time on, I stopped at the end of each sentence, and let the tornado of applause and laughter sweep around me...."⁹⁵ Even Grant--rigid, poker-faced Grant--erupted into laughter.

Twain's oratorical masterpiece was a clever speech about babies, a topic with which most of the audience could easily identify: "We have not all been generals, or poets, or statesmen; but when the toast works down to the babies, we stand on common ground."⁹⁶ Initially scoffing at the troublesome newborn ("He is enterprising, irrepressible, brimful of lawless activities."⁹⁷), Twain then praised the

importance of the baby for the future of the United States. Great astronomers, historians, and politicians he told them would soon arise from out of blissful cribs to take over the leadership and welfare of the country. However, near the end of his speech, Twain suddenly changed his tone and seemed to court disaster by intentionally hurling an insult at the great General.

And in still one more cradle, somewhere under the flag, the future illustrious commander-in-chief of the American armies is so little burdened with his approaching grandeurs and responsibilities as to be giving his whole strategic mind at this moment to trying to find out some way to get his big toe into his mouth--an achievement which, meaning no disrespect, the illustrious guest of this evening turned his entire attention to some fifty-six years ago....⁹⁸

Here adds Paine: "He paused, and the vast crowd had a chill of fear. After all, he seemed likely to overdo it--to spoil everything with a cheap joke at the end...."⁹⁹

But Twain, that master rhetorician, waited a few breathless moments "until the tension was painful,"¹⁰⁰ and then uttered his coup de maitre that visibly moved Grant and brought down the house: "and if the child is but a prophecy of the man, there are mighty few who will doubt that he succeeded."¹⁰¹

Victoriously, he writes to Mrs. Clemens:

I broke him up, utterly! He told me he laughed till the tears came and every bone in his body ached. (And do you know, the biggest part of the success of the speech lay in the fact that the audience saw that for once in his life he had been knocked out of his iron serenity.)¹⁰²

The parenthetical statement is wonderfully significant. By adding that "supplemental information," Twain shrewdly reasserts his own victory. It is his speech that removes the iron-clad impassiveness of Grant and allows the entire country (symbolically represented by the members of the press and the military and civilian delegates gathered in the audience) to see him exposed. The emperor without his clothes. And Twain did it all.

By mastering Grant, Twain had also conquered the civilian and military communities. Every "Tom, Dick and Harry--even the policemen--captured me in the halls and shook hands...."¹⁰³ boasts Twain. Scores of army officers praised him. Besides Grant, all the generals (and there were many) assembled to render their felicitations. "General Pope," says Twain, "came to hunt me up--I was afraid to speak to him in that theatre stage last night, thinking it might be presumptuous to tackle a man so high up in military history. Gen. Schofield, and other historic men,

paid their compliments."¹⁰⁴ Kaplan is correct in suggesting that "Clemens saw himself as the hero of the banquet, as if he had been borne aloft in triumph after a symbolic tournament in which he had vanquished Grant himself. By making this iron man laugh and cheer with all the others he had, in a sense, destroyed him."¹⁰⁵ Jubilantly, Twain writes to William Dean Howells:

I shook him up like dynamite & he sat there fifteen minutes & laughed & cried like the mortalest of mortals. But bless you I had measured this unconquerable conqueror, & went at my work with the confidence of conviction, for I knew I could lick him. He told me he had shaken hands with 15,000 people that day & come out of it without an ache or pain, but that my truths had racked all the bones of his body apart.¹⁰⁶

Twain, a lowly rebel, had accomplished in one short night what the entire Confederacy had failed to attain in four years: the conquest of General Grant. He aptly tells his wife: "I guess this was the memorable night of my life."¹⁰⁷

One more event, however, was needed to complete Twain's conquest and to keep him inseparably linked with Grant. That occurrence, Twain's publication of the Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant in 1885, added the final laurel to his victory. With outlandish audacity and peerless confidence,

Twain, according to his own memoirs, telescoped months of hard bargaining into two days. All the Grant-party could reply in the face of Twain's convincing and persistent arguments was a succinct: "Give the book to Clemens."¹⁰⁸ And there was a benevolent aspect to this transaction. Twain had heard that the ever-trusting Grant had been defrauded by a colleague and was at the point of bankruptcy.¹⁰⁹ Thus, by aligning himself with Grant and securing the contract for his Memoirs, Twain had in effect come to the rescue of the man who had "fought" against him in the damp forests of Missouri.¹¹⁰ Mark Twain had converted his flight from the War into the triumphant return of an experienced writer and businessman who appears, says James Cox in Mark Twain: The Fate of Humor, "as the knight in shining armor to rescue from imminent ruin the dying warrior who had once defeated him."¹¹¹ Twain greatly eased the financial burden of Grant, who was almost penniless and dying, and later delivered to his widow the unprecedented royalty of \$250,000. Concerning Twain's generous publishing terms, Cox adds:

As a former Southern soldier, a traitor no less, he was in a position to offer his old antagonist terms as liberal as those Grant had given at Appomattax.¹¹²

For Twain, the benevolent victor, it was a much longed for and needed success. Mark Twain's victory over his former

opponent was a kind of victory over his past. William Dean Howells wrote in 1910: "One of the highest satisfactions of Clemens'...life was his relation to Grant."¹¹³

Even more remarkable than his close association with Grant was his unbridled fondness for the cadets of the United States Military Academy. Mark Twain and West Point were indeed strange companions, but they had a long and pleasant history together. His admiration and respect for this institution and its alumni, who bravely fought on both sides in the Civil War, remained undiminished. "The West Point cadets," said Mark Twain, "become gentlemen the first year & remain so the rest of their lives."¹¹⁴ In Life on the Mississippi he praised the skill and confidence of "The Point's" engineers in their herculean task to tame that "lawless" river: "The West Point engineers have not their superiors anywhere; they know all that can be known of their abstruse science.... Captain Eads, with his jetties, has done a work at the mouth of the Mississippi which seemed clearly impossible...."¹¹⁵ In a speech in Hartford, Connecticut, in June 1881 he proudly summarized the Academy's military reputation: "...the highest military authority in the land, yes, in the world, if an American does say it-- [is] West Point!"¹¹⁶

Twain's first direct experience with "my dear boys," as he would call the cadets, was at the Centennial Exhibition held in Philadelphia.¹¹⁷ There, as a member of the Congress

of Authors, he warmly reviewed the cadets as they marched in honor of the country's one hundredth birthday. Two years later while touring in Germany he wrote in his notebook:

Institutions to be proud of--West Point & Annapolis--plenty of ceremony--fortitude taught there as in Heidelberg dueling--my enthusiasms & desires are dying out, but I do want to see the boys at West Point. I remember yet how they impressed me at the Centennial.¹¹⁸

Mark Twain would visit West Point not once, but three times during the late 1870's and five more times commencing in 1881.¹¹⁹ During his first three visits to the Academy, Twain gave no formal lectures to the Corps of Cadets, but instead held informal talks in a cadet's room. On two occasions he gathered the fifty-five members of the class of 1880 about him in the quarters of cadet Andrew G. Hammond.¹²⁰ Captain Oberlin M. Carter, a member of that class and a friend of Hammond's, recalls those times:

Twain told stories to the cadets for several hours on each visit. Except at those times when the cadets laughed uproariously at Twain's jokes and shafts of wit,...the attention given to Twain's remarks by these eager young men was

so intense that 'you could have heard a pin drop'.... Only a few of us could sit down, the rest just stood, solid-packed, in that small room. Nobody dared cough or make a sound. Everybody was afraid he might miss a word of those stories.... I think he enjoyed talking to us boys as much as we enjoyed having him. He impressed me as being a man's man and we were flattered by having him treat us as men. He certainly did not talk down to us as did many of our officers.¹²¹

His arrival on February 28, 1881 gained the acquaintance of the Post Adjutant, Lieutenant Charles Erskine Scott Wood, who would print fifty copies of 1601 on the Academy's small press the following year.¹²² The last five visits to "The Point" included a reading, and though there is no record of what text Mark Twain used in the earlier readings, Albert Bigelow Paine mentions that in the later visits

He usually gave chapters from his Yankee, now soon to be finished, chapters generally beginning with the Yankee's impression of the curious country and its people, ending with the battle of the Sun-belt, when the Yankee and his 54 adherents [cadets] were masters of England....¹²³

Twain would also mention the military academies that Hank Morgan was covertly organizing in King Arthur's realm:

One of my deepest secrets was my West Point-- my military academy. I kept that most jealously out of sight; and I did the same with my naval academy which I established at a remote seaport. Both were prospering to my satisfaction.¹²⁴

It should surprise no one that the models for these "Arthurian Military Academies" were West Point and Annapolis and that Twain, through Hank Morgan, was genuinely sincere in emphasizing their importance and soundness for a modern nation. They were part of his "civilization nurseries." One may argue that these military institutions like the other establishments in A Connecticut Yankee were merely being satirized. However, considering his obvious affection for West Point and its graduates, Twain was speaking honestly of the Academy as a merit to the country. It trained men to lead intelligently. And just as important, it instructed them to be honest, sincere, frank. In a letter to Henry Ward Beecher dated September 11, 1885, Mark Twain wrote of the refreshing openness of the men from West Point:

Regular army men have no concealments about each other; and yet they make their awful statements without shade or color or malice--with a frankness and a child-like naïvety, indeed, which

is enchanting--and stupefying. West Point seems to teach them that, among other priceless things not to be got in any other college in this world.¹²⁵

Hank Morgan was adamant in securing positions for his cadets in King Arthur's army so as to negate the incompetent, sycophantic officers of the aristocracy. After all, Grant, Sherman, and Sheridan--all West Point graduates--guided the North to victory after correcting the injuries caused by the inept politician-generals in the early years of the war.

Twain's great affinity for West Point and his total devotion to Grant are vital factors for the gradual reduction of the trauma caused by his experiences in the War. By aligning himself with the United States Military Academy--that venerable institution also splintered and divided in loyalties by the war, but unblemished and free from guilt--Mark Twain gained a much needed sense of identity, of relief, of respectability. West Point emerged from the Civil War as one of America's most hallowed institutions¹²⁶ and each visit to "The Point," each conversation with a cadet, each transcription of Grant's Memoirs served as a vindication of his self-doubt and a subsequent repair of his injured conscience. Grant was more than a special friend. He was, as Daniel Aaron says,

...the Great Soldier, the Hero to Mark Twain's antihero. By attaching himself, so to speak, to the General's regimentals, entertaining him, and finally by publishing and marketing three hundred thousand sets of Grant's Memoirs, he acquired a kind of derived honor: the man of peace linked in the public's eye with the man of war and gaining credit by this affiliation.¹²⁷

Mark Twain, Grant, West Point: it was exoneration by association. The doubts and fears which haunted Twain were purged. After nearly twenty-five long years of anguish, the constant nagging in the back of his mind vanished: he was able to write "The Private History of a Campaign That Failed" (1885). In a time when, as Ella Lonn states, "it was the fashion to glorify war, to applaud the deeds of heroism and sacrifice,"¹²⁸ Mark Twain's account can only be considered a brave story by a brave man. Twain sought exculpation and achieved it. Kaplan was on the right track:

...he had been all these [rebel, deserter, slacker] , but by his confession in such bold, ironic terms he is free from punishment and also free to channel his accumulation of anger and contempt.¹²⁹

"By the mid-eighties," Daniel Aaron adds, "he had reached the point where he could equivocate about War...."¹³⁰

More than that, as the 1890's show, he stood ready to fight

actively against war at home or abroad--with his pen.

The end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the next greeted the world with a series of imperialistic wars: first the Spanish-American War (April-December 1898) and the Philippine Insurrection (February 1899-April 1902) and then the Boer War (October 1899-May 1902) and the Boxer Rebellion (June-September 1900). Twain's disgust over such rapacious behavior by presumably "civilized" nations was expressed in "A Greeting from the Nineteenth to the Twentieth Century," published in the New York Herald on December 31, 1900.

I bring you the stately matron named Christendom, returning bedraggled, besmirched, and dishonored from pirate-raids in Kiao-Chou, Manchuria, South Africa, & the Philippines, with her soul full of meanness, her pocket full of boodle and her mouth full of pious hypocrisies. Give her soap and a towel, but hide the looking-glass.¹³¹

Twain took an active part against imperialism and would later join the Anti-Imperialist League, as did Howells. Initially, however, Mark Twain was an advocate of the immensely popular Spanish-American War, "a splendid little war,"¹³² as Secretary of State John Hay called it. Of its extraordinary appeal to the nation, Samuel E. Morison states in The Oxford History of the American People:

America rushed into the war 'to free Cuba,' more nearly unanimous than in any war in her history. The few who cried out against the childish jingoism, the unjust blackening of Spain's noble history, and above all, the needlessness of the war, were dismissed as cranks or old fogies.¹³³

Twain's incipient response followed the majority's. His June 1898 letter to Joseph Twichell depicts his elation:

I have never enjoyed a war--ever in written history--as I am enjoying this one. For this is the worthiest one that was ever fought, so far as my knowledge goes. It is a worthy thing to fight for one's freedom; it is another sight finer to fight for another man's. And I think this is the first time it has been done.¹³⁴

Twain's initial support of the war seems odd, but any fears he might have had were probably allayed by a Congressional statement which appeared shortly after war was declared on April 11, 1898:

The United States hereby disclaims any disposition or intention to exercise sovereignty, jurisdiction, or control over said island except for the pacification thereof, and asserts its determination... to leave the government and control of the island

to its people.¹³⁵

But Mark Twain learned that he had been misled and two years later, in 1900, changed his mind as the aftermath of the war became imperialistic and exploitative: "When the United States sent word that the Cuban atrocities must end, she occupied the highest moral position ever taken by a nation.... But when she snatched the Philippines and butchered a poverty-stricken...nation of children, she stained the flag."¹³⁶ This transformation from jubilation to despair is comparable to his youthful experiences in the Civil War. At first it seemed worthy and honorable to fight, but when the war involved killing innocent people and being misled by politicians, the glamour of it disappeared.

Significantly, Mark Twain does not retreat as in his Civil War days or hide in the safety of his humor; instead, he stays to fight against this mindless war, a war exploited by unscrupulous journalists and politicians. To such phrases as "We cannot retire from it [war in the Philippines] without dishonor," and the ubiquitous "My Country Right or Wrong" was added Twain's "I am an anti-imperialist"¹³⁷ and "the spirit of patriotism is the spirit of the dog and the wolf."¹³⁸

In his last decade Twain became an indefatigable critic concerning the wars of his country and other nations and wrote a tremendous amount of anti-war literature. His most

important anti-imperialistic statement during this period was "To the Person Sitting in Darkness," published in February 1901. Its unmerciful attack on the Western Powers' dastardly acts in the Philippines, South Africa, and China earned for Twain the undying respect of the anti-imperialists and the eternal contempt of the "Hawks." The anti-imperialists were denounced as traitors in the press. One pro-imperialist publication said that had an article like "To the Person Sitting in Darkness" appeared in any other war the author would have been convicted as a traitor.¹³⁹

This "traitorous" piece contains an element which stands at the core of nearly all of Mark Twain's anti-war literature: his unmitigated hatred of the super-patriots, those zealous and irresponsible politicians, journalists, and priests of the world who manipulate and deceive the morals of the young. Twain experienced its baffling effects during his Civil War days. He relates in the "Private History":

...he [Colonel Ralls] took us to a distant meadow, and there...we listened to an old-fashioned speech from him, full of gunpowder and glory, full of that adjective-piling, mixed metaphor, and windy declamation which was regarded as eloquence in that ancient time and that remote region; and then he swore us on the Bible to be faithful to the State of Missouri and drive all

invaders from her soil, no matter whence they might come or under what flag they might march. This mixed us considerably, and we could not make out just what service we were embarked in; but Colonel Ralls, the practiced politician and phrase-juggler, was not similarly in doubt; he knew quite clearly that he had invested us in the cause of the Southern Confederacy. (p. 23)

He sees it again decades later in the Philippines, and attacks it fiercely and determinedly. His confusion is gone. To the American--the civilian or recruit--questioning the validity of our presence in that foreign land, Twain satirically says in "To the Person Sitting in Darkness": "...we must persuade him to look at the Philippine matter in another and healthier way. We must arrange his opinions for him. I believe it can be done...most cleverly and successfully."¹⁴⁰ This deceptive art does not end in America but continues in the newly acquired territories:

We...placed our sick and wounded in their [the Filipinos'] kindly care;...praised their fine and honorable conduct;...lied to them--officially proclaiming that our land and naval forces came to give them their freedom and displace the bad Spanish Government--fooled them, used them until we needed them no longer; then

derided the sucked orange and threw it away.¹⁴¹

The above incident specifically referred to the plight of General Emilio Aguinaldo, the Filipino patriot. The American government had assured him the independence of his country if he would rally his forces with those of the United States to fight the Spanish. He did, and Twain felt that the obvious thing to do was to turn the Philippines over to the Filipinos. Aguinaldo was incarcerated; both he and Twain were betrayed. "What we wanted...", lamented Twain, "was the Archipelago, unencumbered by patriots struggling for independence...."¹⁴² Faced with this embarrassment, President McKinley decided it would be best "to take them all [the islands of the Philippines] and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them."¹⁴³ (Mark Twain was quick to note that many of the Filipinos had been Christians for three centuries.) Re-emphasizing American intentions, McKinley added: "No imperial designs lurk in the American mind. They are alien to American sentiment, thought and purpose...."¹⁴⁴

The incident with Aguinaldo infuriated Twain and to him exemplified the shameful conduct of the American government. Not only had Aguinaldo been deceived, he was also stealthily captured by General Funston and his soldiers who posed as friendly troops. This "daring" coup placed the General in the public's eye, his picture and story

appearing in every kind of publication.¹⁴⁵ Newly promoted and politically ambitious (there was talk of his campaigning for President), General Funston vaunted of his brave exploits before the elite Lotus Club in New York where he also lashed out at all the traitorous Americans who had their doubts about the war: "I would rather see any of these men hanged--hanged for treason, hanged for giving aid and comfort to the enemy--than see the humblest soldier in the United States lying dead."¹⁴⁶ This diatribe was too much for Twain who attacked this super-patriot in the ironically entitled "A Defence of General Funston," published in May 1902: "It seems to me that General Funston's appreciation of the capture needs editing.... He is a brave man.... For his sake it is a pity that somewhat of that quality was not needed in the episode under consideration...."¹⁴⁷ This piece made new enemies for Twain. The "Funstian Patriots" named Twain a traitor, a title which elated him. "They are always doing...little compliments like that; they are just born flatterers, those boys."¹⁴⁸

The public's high opinion of General Funston, aided by his ample coverage in the press, blinded the nation to the truth. Their consciences, Twain believed, were cowed by the relentless appeal to patriotism, party, and country. American sympathies in the Spanish-American War and in the Philippine Insurrection were recklessly inflamed by the newspapers of William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer

in their race for circulation.¹⁴⁹ In fact, it was the incessant clamor for war by the press and by Congress which forced a vacillating McKinley to yield to their demands and to declare war.¹⁵⁰ A year later he would confess: "But for the inflamed state of public opinion, and the fact that Congress could no longer be held in check, a peaceful solution might have been had."¹⁵¹

America's conflict with the Filipinos occurred at approximately the same time as England's clash with the Boers. And again, Mark Twain viewed this war as the hapless struggle of a simple and honorable people invaded by an imperialistic horde which was fueled by the patriotic rant of its leaders. On October 11, 1899, the day the Boer War was officially announced in England, a visiting Clemens wrote:

The time is up! Without a doubt the first shot in the war is being fired to-day in South Africa at this moment. Some man had to be the first to fall; he has fallen. Whose heart is broken by this murder? For, be he Boer or be he Briton, it is murder, & England committed it by the hand of Chamberlain & the Cabinet, the lackeys of Cecil Rhodes & his Forty Thieves, the South Africa Company.¹⁵²

This stinging invective was written for anonymous pub-

lication in the London Times, but Twain reconsidered and never sent it.¹⁵³ Aside from the imperialistic aspect of this contest, the Boer War deeply disturbed Twain. He had visited South Africa in 1896 and had become an ardent admirer of the Boers, staunchly advocating their independence. However, because of America's close cultural, historical, and political ties with England, he refrained from publishing any current anti-British statements. In addition, England was still the political power in the world and a defeat by the Boers "would mean an inundation of Russian & German political degradations which would envelop the globe & steep it in a sort of Middle-Age night...."¹⁵⁴ Twain shared his dilemma in a letter to William Dean Howells: "My head is with the Briton, but my heart & such rags of morals as I have are with the Boer."¹⁵⁵

As in his Civil War experience, Twain feels the discomforting tugs of opposing loyalties on his conscience. This unsettledness can be discerned in his "anonymous" invective which in its phrasing is remarkably similar to the killing scene in the "Private History": "he has fallen," "I saw the man fall" (p. 38); "Whose heart is broken by this murder," "'This thing that I have done does not end with him; it falls upon them too'" (p. 39); "it is murder," "I was a murderer" (p. 38). The Boer conflict is extremely personal to Twain. However, unlike his silence during the Civil War, Twain expresses his views on the South African

struggle in Following the Equator (1897), a work used in America to aid the Boer cause. Twain found it difficult, but he did speak out.

Twain's moral dilemma over the Boer War did not affect his anti-imperialistic attitude concerning the Boxer Rebellion which erupted less than a year later (June 1900). During his years in California, Twain developed a great affinity for the Chinese, finding them honorable, hard-working people. Yet in America and especially in China, these ingenuous people were pitilessly victimized. The richest areas of China were handily partitioned among enterprising foreign powers in the name of free trade. As early as 1868, Twain had warned of a possible revolution by the Chinese to end the economic rape of their country by unwanted nations.¹⁵⁶ Thus, when the Chinese rose to cast out all the "foreign devils," Twain pledged his total support and declared himself a Boxer at the Berkeley Lyceum in November 1900:

China never wanted foreigners any more than foreigners wanted Chinamen, and on this question I am with the Boxers every time. The Boxer is a patriot. He loves his country better than he does the countries of other people. I wish him success. We drive the Chinamen out of our country; the Boxer believes in driving us out of his country. I am a Boxer, too, on those terms.¹⁵⁷

But Twain realized that the Boxer Rebellion had little chance of success against the combined might of eight nations. (The United States itself would send warships and two thousand troops.) Once victorious, they would extract painful reparation. Mark Twain was not fooled when Secretary of State John Hay declared it the policy of the United States "to preserve Chinese territorial and administrative entity... and safeguard for the world the principle of equal and impartial trade with all parts of the Chinese Empire."¹⁵⁸ He had heard a similarly empty statement during the Spanish-American War.

Perhaps the piece which best describes the process of a nation's unknowing plunge into supporting an unjust war is Twain's The Mysterious Stranger, published after his death:

The loud little handful--as usual--will shout for the war. The pulpit will...object--at first; the great big dull bulk of the nation will...say, earnestly and indignantly, 'It is unjust and dishonorable, and there is no necessity for it.' Then the handful will shout louder...and presently the anti-war audiences will thin out and lose popularity. Before long...the whole nation--pulpit and all--will take up the war-cry, and shout itself hoarse, and mob any honest man who ventures to open his mouth.... Next, the statesmen will in-

vent cheap lies, putting the blame upon the nation that is attacked, and every man will be glad of those conscience-soothing falsities, and will diligently study them, and refuse to examine any refutations of them; and thus he will by and by convince himself that the war is just....¹⁵⁹

Twain believes that it is the responsibility of every citizen of every nation to obey his conscience in any issue, be it war or peace. The cries of the priest and politician for patriotism, loyalty, justice are not to be heeded. Each man must decide for himself what is right and just. "A man's first duty," stresses Twain, "is to his own conscience and honor; the party and country come second to that, never first."¹⁶⁰ Loyalty to one's country is independent of its institutions, its leaders, and its policies. Twain eloquently elaborates in A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court: "The country is the real thing, the substantial thing, the eternal thing; it is the thing to watch over, and care for, and be loyal to; institutions are extraneous...."¹⁶¹

Twain's relentless campaign against imperialism made him many friends; it also made him many enemies. But despite the threats of physical violence and the risk of financial harm through a decline in the sales of his books, Twain continued to write, to speak out. He was not at all

frightened. Later, he got so bold as to attack President Theodore Roosevelt, an act without precedent for Twain. The political leaders of the Civil War, Lincoln and Davis, never came under any abuse from him. And the most disparaging statement he ever made about the South was a guarded utterance concerning a painting of Jackson's and Lee's last conversation just before the Battle of Chancellorsville. When asked for a title to this scene, he suggested: "Jackson Asking Lee for a Match."¹⁶²

But Twain attacks the Rough Rider unconditionally. He finds the statesmanship and politics of Roosevelt

...destitute of morals and not respectable.

It is plain that where his political...and...party self are concerned he has nothing resembling a conscience....

...Theodore the man is sane; in fairness we ought to keep in mind that Theodore, as statesman and politician, is insane and irresponsible.¹⁶³

And with more elaboration: "I think the President is clearly insane in several ways, and insanest upon war and its supreme glories."¹⁶⁴ Edmund Morris suggests in The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt that this President had an "irrational love of battle," constantly praising "the joys of righteous killing."¹⁶⁵ In the annual message to Congress (1907) he asserts: "A just war is in the long run far better for a man's soul

than the most prosperous peace."¹⁶⁶ Twain scoffs: "He was in a skirmish once at San Juan Hill, and he got so much moonshine glory out of it that he has never been able to stop talking about it since."¹⁶⁷ But Twain deeply feared that Roosevelt, contemptuous of international law and even the Constitution (Joe Cannon, Speaker of the House, said of Roosevelt: "he's got no more use for the Constitution than a tomcat has for a marriage license."¹⁶⁸), would plunge the country into war and monarchy. Others shared Twain's apprehension. The editor of the St. Louis Censor warned: "Almost every week his Administration has been characterized by some outrageous act of usurpation...he is the most dangerous foe to human liberty that has ever set foot on American soil."¹⁶⁹ Woodrow Wilson said: "He is the most dangerous man of the age."¹⁷⁰ Twain summarizes: "Mr Roosevelt is the most formidable disaster that has befallen the country since the Civil War...."¹⁷¹

Twain's scathing attacks puzzled many. Many readers, baffled and dismayed by his staunch anti-imperialism, believed that his caustic comments about the president and the government were only another form of his wide and varied humor. Certainly, he was temperamental and unpredictable, but he was a funny man, a frontier humorist, and that was all. A pro-imperialist queried:

Exactly why a professional 'funny man,' whose life-work has been the construction of amusing

absurdities, should consider himself or be considered by others qualified to seriously discuss grave questions of statesmanship that he has never studied, we don't know.¹⁷²

Twain, at last, was not afraid to speak. His daughter Clara best summed it up: "He had given out his innermost convictions, and nothing could make him regret it."¹⁷³ As a social critic no one could accuse him of cowardice.

Notes

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VITA

Franklin J. Hillson

Born in Lewistown, Pennsylvania on May 7, 1952. Graduated from Central High School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, June 12, 1970. Received a B.A. in English from the Virginia Military Institute, May 15, 1975. Entered the College of William and Mary on June 2, 1980 as a candidate for an M.A. in English.