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MARK TWAIN AT MID-CENTURY

1950 - 1961

A Synthesis of Critical Views Fifty Years After His Death

by

Margery Blanche Turner

A Thesis

Presented to

the Graduate Faculty of the Department of English

University of Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

June 1961

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PREFACE

"Fame is a vapor; popularity is an accident; the only earthly certainty is oblivion." --Mark Twain[1]

The fame of Mark Twain has been steadily increasing over the years as new generations of readers are discovering the power of his persuasive voice and his matchless humor. The pertinency of his comments on man's predicament in a modern world is often startling. Mid-twentieth-century readers are aware that his contribution to the American experience is vital. Today the volume of information about Mark Twain is a tribute to his far-reaching fame as a man of letters.

> There remains for consideration at least one American author of the nineteenth century--essentially American and essentially "nineteenth century"--who, perhaps, of them all is the only one who in the twentieth century and even outside America can be certain of finding his way for more than one book into any list of living literature.[2]

This popularity is no accident but the result of his own conscious, painstaking craftsmanship.

The subject of this thesis is appropriate at this time because of the wealth of material published about Mark Twain

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[1]Samuel Langhorne Clemens, Mark Twain's Notebook, ed. A.B. Paine (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1935), p. 114.

[2]Allen Angoff, ed. American Writing Today (New York: New York University Press, 1957), p. 50.

in observance of two anniversary dates in 1960: the one hundred twenty-fifth anniversary of his birth at Florida, Missouri; and the fiftieth anniversary of his death at Redding, Connecticut.[3] A synthesis of the critical views of the man and his work, including a generous sampling of both academic and popular opinions, should present a dynamic portrait of America's first major author born west of the Mississippi River.

For their inspiration and guidance I am grateful to Dr. Robert D. Harper, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts; Dr. Ralph M. Wardle, Head of the Department of English; Dr. Paul C. Rodgers, Associate Professor of English; all of the University of Omaha.

M. B. T.

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[3]Mark Twain said: "I came in with Halley's Comet in 1835. It is coming again next year [1910], and I expect to go out with it. It will be the greatest disappointment of my life if I don't go out with Halley's Comet. The Almighty has said, no doubt: 'Now here are these two unaccountable freaks; they came in together, they must go out together.'" The perihelion of Halley's Comet for 1835 was November 16th; Mark Twain was born November 30, 1835. For 1910 it was April 20th; Mark Twain died April 21, 1910. Clemens, *Mark Twain at Your Fingertips*, ed. Caroline Thomas Harnsberger (New York: Beechhurst Press, 1948), p. 170.

CONTENTS

Preface

1. Introduction to a Study of Mark Twain Criticism 1

    Modern Critical Trends 4

2. Backgrounds of Present-Day Criticism (1910-1950) 12

3. The Popularity of Mark Twain 32

4. The Personality of Mark Twain 46

5. Mark Twain as a Social Critic 69

6. Mark Twain as a Literary Artist 96

Bibliography

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The central purpose of this study is to investigate some of the recent criticism, both scholarly and popular, of the literary work of Samuel Langhorne Clemens to try to discover how it reflects the general trends in modern literary criticism. The great surge of popular interest in Mark Twain stems from many sources and has varied causes. Particularly at the close of a very successful anniversary year, it is interesting to make a general survey of the literature, both books and periodicals, in an attempt to synthesize the major ideas expressed in them. For the purposes of this investigation the research has been limited to the last decade, 1950 to 1961, except where it has been necessary to refer to earlier works to establish a background for the present study and to trace developments and changes in literary criticism over the past fifty years.

An artist usually begins to be truly appreciated fifty years after his death, when his audience has achieved enough perspective to begin to see the man in the round. The work of a literary artist not only reflects his own time but also projects an image of the future. Until this image has been realized, the view of the critic is narrow, and the artist is always impatient with it. Twain said, "I like

criticism, but it must be my way."[1] And again, "If a critic should start a religion, it would not have any object but to convert angels, and they wouldn't need it."[2]

Until the past decade Twain's work had not received the serious attention shown other great American writers:

> Mark Twain has received less truly critical attention than any of our major authors. What has baffled commentators is not a lack of sympathy with Twain or an uncertainty about the value of his work (Huckleberry Finn is almost universally regarded as one of the greatest of our novels, and, indeed, is challenged for first place only by Moby Dick); they are put off rather by Twain's own pretense that he was a non-artist or even an anti-artist.3

Twain wisely realized that he needed to play the role of non-artist, for as he said, "An audience likes a speaker [or writer] with the same weaknesses and the same virtues as they themselves have. If the lecturer's brow is too high and the brows of the audience are too low, look out."[4]

Critical literature today reveals not only that the art of effective criticism has reached a new summit in

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[1]Samuel Langhorne Clemens, Mark Twain's Autobiography, ed. Albert Bigelow Paine (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1924), II, 247.

[2]Ibid., 894.

[3]Leslie A. Fiedler, "American Literature," Contemporary Literary Scholarship, ed. Lewis Leary (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1958), p. 183.

[4]As quoted by Opie Read, Mark Twain and I (Chicago: Reilly and Lee, 1940), p. 53.

American letters but also that critical methods of many writers show a maturity of judgment heretofore unknown. This improvement in modern criticism has been observed by most critics themselves.

> The last fifty years have been the most active and the most comprehensive in the history of American literary criticism. While the "ideal critic" has probably not appeared, American criticism has for the first time developed a perceptiveness, a resourcefulness, and a diversity of critical methods which indicate that it has finally reached its maturity.5

Moreover, a widening world outlook has given the critic's eye more perspective. For these reasons the literary portrait of a cosmopolitan like Mark Twain may be expected to have more highlights and shadows than earlier critics could have seen. The extent and purposes of Twain scholarship at this time should bring into focus the attitudes that Americans now exhibit toward one of their greatest men of letters. This richer portrait will be the subject of study in this paper after a preliminary survey of modern critical trends. In view of the importance of contemporary literary criticism to American scholarship, a delineation of current theories and methods is essential to establish a background for the present study.

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[5]Clarence Arthur Brown, ed. The Achievements of American Criticism (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1954), p. 572.

MODERN CRITICAL TRENDS

The major trends in literary criticism of the early part of this century serve as a background for the more thorough examination of the modern critical climate. Each generation commonly finds weaknesses in the ideas of its predecessors, and therefore strikes out in a new direction, forming, as the student of historical criticism recognizes, rather well-defined major shifts in the critical views. These shifts reflect certain aspects of the time in which the writer lives. Thus it may be seen that as the last shadows of romantic criticism faded away, new methods which were a protest against sentimental subjectivism replaced them.

In "The Scholar-Critic," Jacques Barzun traces these critical developments through four stages: historical, sociological, impressionistic and introspective, and finally, the "New Criticism."[6] He points out that the aim of the New Critics is akin to that of the French medieval scholastics whose approach featured _explication de texte_, or unfolding the true and hidden meanings of the work. Although modern critics do not, as a rule, confine themselves to any single approach, and may employ different terminology, they include

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[6] _Contemporary Literary Scholarship_, p. 5.

these same approaches in their present-day critical categories. For example, Philip Wheelwright refers to the "three elements of contemporary criticism--the anthropological, the psychological, and the semantic." To this list C. Hugh Holman adds sociological and historical criticism.[7] Clarence Brown defines critical trends more specifically:

> Contemporary criticism would seem to resolve itself into a few fairly distinct main trends. The work of aesthetic criticism, of formal textual analysis, deriving from Poe, Henry James, Ezra Pound, and T.S. Eliot, is being carried on by such critics as Cleanth Brooks, R.P. Blackmur, Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, and Kenneth Burke. The historical interpretation of literature in terms of its social and cultural relationships is represented by such writers as Edmund Wilson, Lionel Trilling, F.O. Matthiessen, Alfred Kazin, and David Daiches, and Yvor Winters. The interpretation of literature in terms of such related fields as psychology and semantics can be seen in the work of such critics as Wilson, Burke, Blackmur, Stanley Hyman, and W.H. Auden. Psychoanalytical criticism likewise has been popular.8

The interpretation of literature and literary figures on the basis of general trends may sometimes be misleading. The tendency of the critic to want to label the creative artist as representative of a particular school of thought may distort the reader's image of that figure and thereby

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[7] "The Defence of Art: Criticism Since 1930," The Development of American Literary Criticism, ed. Floyd Stovall (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955), p. 201.

[8] Brown, p. 570.

cause confusion. This possibility is clearly outlined by Harold Taylor:

> Whenever we take a writer out of his natural element that is, treat him as other than a human being who is writing what he knows, we run the risk of destroying his value to the reader by making him represent a category of thought to which he has been assigned after the fact, usually after his death. [Dr. Taylor deplores] . . . classifying authors into categories, and otherwise drawing attention away from the writer himself. The writer must be allowed to stand on his own feet. Indeed, his greatness is established by the fact that he continues to stand on his own feet from generation to generation, and that he is perpetually rediscovered for himself and for what he has to say.9

On the other hand, the tracing of significant features--historical, aesthetic, sociological, or psychological--of the critical approach, even with the limitations imposed by the categorical method, may be advantageous.[10]

Many reasons have been advanced for the fact that critical judgment flourishes today. Critical writings are a part of the literary renaissance in America during the past quarter-century. To qualify as true criticism, the work of the critic must augment other methods of literary scholarship; evaluation and judgment must be paramount.

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[9]"The Private World of the Man with a Book," Saturday Review, January 7, 1961, p. 19.

[10] Brown, p. 572, comments: "There are obvious advantages in pointing out trends, since it is mainly through such general tendencies that the shifting attitudes and methods in literary criticism from one period of time to another may be distinguished and characterized."

> The critic, when he is more than a mere reviewer or a historian, is the defender and justifier of art, either implicitly or explicitly, and current American criticism differs most from the past in the intensity and thoroughness with which it examines, by a variety of methods, the fundamental values of art--values which other, and perhaps happier, ages assumed without inquiry or analysis.[11]

The modern critic is not only evaluating the elements in his own age which call forth criticism, but also re-evaluating the art of the past. For this reason there is currently a revival of interest among the critics and the public alike in the writers of the nineteenth century: Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, Henry James, and Mark Twain. Thus several factors are seen to be involved in the critical climate today. "Criticism," Holman explains, "is an always unique fusion of the *Zeitgeist* and the critical personality, and no matter how individual he may be the complex of thought and event within which a critic works determines many aspects of his criticism . . . ."[12]

The critical categories previously mentioned may be divided into two major approaches used by today's critics: the "synthetic"--those who find the chief value of literature in its *extrinsic* relation to society and civilization, and the "analytic" approach--those who prefer to demonstrate the *intrinsic* worth of literature. Most critics tend to

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[11] Holman, "The Defence of Art . . . ," *The Development of American Literary Criticism*, p. 202.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 200.

combine these approaches in their work, so that establishing a definite dividing line between groups is neither possible nor practicable. However, the use of extrinsic-intrinsic criteria to evaluate literary merit is commonly seen in modern criticism, and champions of both positions have often spoken out in favor of their methods.

If the convenient labels "extrinsic" and "intrinsic" are employed to illustrate the trends in criticism, the extrinsic group would include those who judge literature primarily for its sociological and historical significance: Marxists, New Humanists, and the non-Marxists, critics who today emphasize the importance and nobility of the national past--Henry Seidel Canby, Constance Rourke, and Howard Mumford Jones are examples. Opposing this approach are the New Critics or Formalists or Objectivists, so-called because of their methodological concern. The intensive semantic analysis of the New Critics developed because

> they were protesting against the kind of literary scholarship current in the thirties, a positivistic scholarship that looked in biography and social milieu for the meaning of literature; and their protest aimed at substituting textual examination and analysis for biographical data and historical classification.[13]

The Formalists, however, are cautioned by Lionel Trilling that in their reaction against the historical method

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[13]*Ibid.*, p. 227.

alone they must not "forget that the literary work is ineluctably a historical fact, and, what is more important, that its historicity is a fact in our aesthetic experience."[14] As an extrinsic critic, Trilling favors the Arnoldian view that art reaches into life. He believes that much may be learned about a work of art by looking into its historical context and also into the personal life of the artist. And Jacques Barzun, in pointing out the flaws in the use of the intrinsic method alone, wonders if the historical method is not, after all, the only one the critic can use, for "it is . . . the one that he has always used, even when he concealed it under new ideologies."[15]

The differences between these two methods have often been the subject of controversy in the critical world. No critic remained entirely in one camp, however. And while the extrinsic-intrinsic battles were being waged, often with vigor and color (especially in the twenties and thirties), a middle-ground of criticism--that of the psychological study of literature--gained new importance. Applying the theories of Freud and Jung to works of art, the psychologically oriented critic began to study the artist's personality as

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[14]"The Sense of the Past," The Liberal Imagination (New York: The Viking Press, 1950), p. 184.

[15]"The Scholar-Critic," Contemporary Literary Scholarship, p. 8.

revealed in each of his works. Today critics continue to use this method when they attempt to evaluate a work of art in relation to the creative processes used by the artist.

In the forties and thereafter, the opposing views tended to fuse, and methods used by the critics became a combination of loosely defined approaches. The armed-camp attitudes of the thirties gradually eased. At the present time these separate ways of looking at a work of art have merged, resulting in a "cross-fertilization which is producing new flowers of criticism which often show attitudes that two decades ago would have been considered incompatible."[16]

Contemporary critics, for the most part, have learned that the better approach to criticism is to allow a work of art to play as it will upon one's feelings, and then to let any analysis be made after determining what those feelings are, rather than to predetermine what one's attitude should be and then extract from the work the meaning that will justify that attitude.

> The more complex a work of art, the more diverse the structure of values it embodies, and hence the more difficult its interpretation, the greater is the danger of ignoring one or another of its aspects.[17]

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[16]Holman, p. 239.

[17]René Wellek, "Literary Theory, Criticism, and History," Sewanee Review, LXVIII (March 1960), 17.

The good critic, therefore, first tries to feel the spirit of a work of art, after which he is better able to discern its organic unity and properly evaluate its parts.

In order to afford a background for comparison with the literature of the mid-century, and illustrate the development of modern critical trends, a survey of forty years of selected Mark Twain criticism from his death up to 1950 is the subject of Chapter Two.

Chapters Three through Six will deal with the separate viewpoints: popular, psychological, sociological, and aesthetic, in that order, as they were largely employed by the critics during the decade of the nineteen-fifties in assessing the work of Mark Twain.

CHAPTER TWO

BACKGROUNDS

Criticism of the personality and writings of Mark Twain passed through several well-defined periods from his death to the half-century mark. In the last years of his life, after the turn of the century, Twain had been regarded by his contemporaries chiefly as a humorist, an entertainer, and a national oracle. If some noteworthy event occurred, hardly a newspaper could be "put to bed" until Mark Twain had been consulted for an opinion. After his death in 1910, amid a flood of world-wide tributes, several rather idealized biographies appeared. This period of hero-worship was followed after World War I by a "debunking" of the hero; he was pictured by Van Wyck Brooks as a frustrated writer, the victim of "genteel" censorship. This theory was the center of a major controversy between Brooks and Bernard DeVoto, who saw Twain as a product of his Western experiences. Meanwhile, posthumous publication of some of Twain's serious writing had aroused churchmen and psychologists to discuss his philosophy. Scholarship thrived on these debates. Then the liberal and Marxist critics of the depression thirties viewed Mark Twain as a social reformer and defender of the downtrodden. In the decade of the forties, the critics

began to concentrate more on Twain's "neuroticism" and to try to discern causes for the pessimism of his later years in his psychic makeup. These historical events in Twain scholarship will be discussed in more detail in order to point out their significance in relation to the critical writings of the past ten years.

Roger Asselineau's extensive bibliography of more than 1300 entries indicates the direction of criticism from 1910 to 1950, and his essay places special emphasis upon the famous Brooks-DeVoto controversy. Although Asselineau includes foreign criticism in his bibliography, he states that he limited his study of Twain's literary reputation to the United States because "no major book of criticism has been written on Mark Twain outside his native country."[1]

Mark Twain did not lack critical acclaim during his lifetime. After the very favorable reception of the "Jumping Frog" story, his reputation as a writer flourished. An especially astute criticism of one early reviewer, George T. Ferris, is mentioned by Arthur L. Scott:

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[1]Roger Asselineau, The Literary Reputation of Mark Twain from 1910-1950, A Critical Essay and Bibliography, Publications de la Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Clermont (Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1954), p. 15.

> As early as 1874 Ferris prophesied a great future for Mark Twain--paying special tribute to his Americanism, his fresh spontaneity, his breadth and ease, his graphic descriptions, and above all, "the intense humanity and lifelikeness" of his humor.2

Whereas occasional early critics thus were able to see a great future for the humorist, after his death some of the literary historians were not so ready to predict a rosy future. W.B. Cairns, in his History of American Literature (1912) says:

> It would be unduly rash to predict at this time the future place of Mark Twain in American literature. It already becomes evident that in his later years and since his death he has been overrated. Little of his ambitiously serious work appears to have the elements of permanency, and it is probable that with change of taste his purely funny writings will seem less interesting.3

Two of Mark Twain's friends brought out biographies of the celebrated humorist almost immediately. William Dean Howells' book of reminiscences appeared in 1910.[4] Two years later, Albert Bigelow Paine's Mark Twain, A Biography: The Personal and Literary Life of Samuel Langhorne Clemens was published.[5] Today most authorities acknowledge some

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[2]Scott, ed. Mark Twain: Selected Criticism (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955), p. 3.

[3]As quoted by Asselineau, p. 21.

[4]My Mark Twain: Reminiscences and Criticism (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1910).

[5]New York: Harper & Brothers, 1912.

debt to this major work, but at the same time qualify its value. It has been shown by subsequent scholars that the Paine volumes have minor omissions and errors, and it is well-known that they are colored by the intense admiration their author felt for the great man whose reminiscences he was charged with presenting to the world. In this biography "emphasis is placed on what is colorful, vivid and entertaining, and those aspects of Mark Twain which show his integrity and fineness."[6] To this judgment of the story of Twain's life may be added Asselineau's comment that "unpleasant details were relegated to foot-notes."[7] In his chapter on "The Growth of the Legend--Mark Twain as a Picturesque Personality and a Great American" this researcher calls Paine's work "romantic." However, Mr. Paine briskly defended his position by reminding those critics who attempted to "explain" Mark Twain as a writer that _he_ wrote from actual knowledge of the author, as other critics did not.

The celebrated man had engaged Mr. Paine in 1906 to edit his autobiography, which, however, was not published until 1924.[8] As for Paine's editing of the _Autobiography_,

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[6]Harry Hayden Clark, "Mark Twain," _Eight American Authors_, ed. Floyd Stovall (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1956), p. 322.

[7]Asselineau, p. 27.

[8]Clemens, _Mark Twain's Autobiography_, ed. Albert Bigelow Paine, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1924).

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[8]Clemens, _Mark Twain's Autobiography_, ed. Albert Bigelow Paine, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1924).

the critics then and now argue the merits of the arrangement of entries used by Mr. Paine. Any attempts to arrange this voluminous series of reminiscences which Twain called his autobiography would be difficult, and unlikely to be wholly satisfactory. As the first literary editor of the Mark Twain Estate, Paine naturally tried to observe carefully his employer's wishes, thus following what Dwight Macdonald calls "the author's plan." The result is a "jumble" which has "suffered the fate of another large edifice, the Colosseum--it has been used as a quarry for builders."[9] Twain's idea of writing his autobiography involved the technique of free association of ideas. As Paine described it,

> Often he did not know until the moment of beginning what was to be his subject for the day; then he was likely to go drifting among his memories in a quite irresponsible fashion, the fashion of table conversation, as he said, the methodless method of the human mind.[10]

Subsequent editors of the *Autobiography* have each used a different method of arrangement, and have presented some new material from the extensive Twain notes, letters, and manuscripts at their disposal in the Mark Twain Papers, now housed in Berkeley at the University of California. For example, Bernard DeVoto, second literary editor of the Twain

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[9]Macdonald, "Mark Twain: An Unsentimental Journey," *The New Yorker*, April 9, 1960, p. 160.

[10]Paine, ed., I, x.

Estate, arranged excerpts of the Autobiography by subject, and Charles Neider followed a chronological order.

Concurrently, scholars began to look more deeply into Twain's writing. As early as 1913, William Marshall Urban noted perceptively that "posterity would remember not the complacencies of Mark Twain, but his indignations."[11] The posthumous publication in the late teens of some of his more metaphysical writings changed the public's opinion of the humorist from a mere buffoon to that of serious writer. The Mysterious Stranger (1916),[12] What is Man? (1917), and The Curious Republic of Gondour and Other Whimsical Sketches (1919) caused criticism of Twain to swing like a pendulum. Waldo Frank, for example, thought Twain had sold his soul to the devil (the American dream of success) and because of this betrayal of his talent "the mass of his works are failures."

> Mark Twain went through life, lost in a bitter blindness that is far more terrible than the hate of men like Schopenhauer or Jonathan Swift. The mighty pessimists were fertile: they plowed great fields with their wrath and sowed them with their love. Mark Twain's was the misery of a love too feeble to create.[13]

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[11]Scott, "Introduction," Selected Criticism, p. 6.

[12]As a result of the confused attitudes about Twain, this book came out as a Christmas item for boys and was lavishly illustrated.

[13]As quoted by Scott, pp. 8, 132.

The idea, set forth by Van Wyck Brooks in his much-discussed The Ordeal of Mark Twain,[14] of the supposed harm done to Twain's career as a writer by the "editing" of his manuscripts by his wife Olivia and his dear friend William Dean Howells was a subject that caused controversy for over a quarter-century. Certainly, the influence of these two persons cannot be overlooked. Howells himself admitted to some prudery:

> Throughout my long acquaintance with him his graphic touch was always allowing itself a freedom which I cannot bring my fainter pencil to illustrate. He had the Southwestern, the Lincolnian, the Elizabethan breadth of parlance, which I suppose one ought not to call coarse without calling one's self prudish; and I was always hiding away in discreet holes and corners the letters in which he had loosed his bold fancy to stoop on rank suggestion; I could not bear to burn them, and I could not, after the first reading, quite bear to look at them.15

Brooks's major theses in his controversial work were drawn from his interest in an extrinsic-intrinsic approach to literature. He was preoccupied with America's lack of culture, and decided that the nation's writers had betrayed their heritage. Thus he "systematically underrated Mark Twain's accomplishments, the better to overrate his potentialities."[16] Brooks talked about Twain's real talent being

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[14]New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1920.

[15]Howells, pp. 3-4.

[16]Asselineau, p. 37.

repressed by "a certain miscarriage in his creative life." He suggested that Twain's was "a balked personality, an arrested development of which he himself was almost wholly unaware, but which for him destroyed the meaning of life."[17] The facts of Twain's life and writing were forced by Brooks to fit the mold of Freudian psychology; the result of this shaping was a mother-wife domination theory--"censorship" by his mother, and later by his wife, snuffed out the artist in Mark Twain.

Brooks discounted the usual explanations--business failures and personal tragedies in the family--for the change in Twain in the late years of his life. Mentioning the popular interest in therapeutics, new medicines, and faith-healing of the 1890's, Brooks said that Mark Twain was looking for a "soul-cure."[18] Ironically, Mr. Brooks apparently failed to see that this estimate of Twain was undoubtedly influenced by his own sympathy with the revival of interest in psychotherapeutics in the 1920's.[19]

Present-day critics look upon The Ordeal of Mark Twain as the work of a literary historian. It was designed by its

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[17] Brooks, p. 14.

[18] Ibid., pp. 10-11.

[19] For a discussion of this vogue and its effects on all aspects of American life, see John Chynoweth Burnham, "Psychiatry and the Progressive Movement," American Quarterly, XII (Winter 1960), 457-465.

author as an exhortation to encourage young writers. However, since the volume emphasized the bitterness, frustration, and despair surrounding Twain, it is not surprising to find many critics now pointing out Brooks's major flaw: he lacked a sense of humor.[20] Alfred Kazin analyzes Brooks's position as that of the postwar spokesman and "historian of the negative and repressive aspects of American culture . . . ."[21] As a historian he became fascinated with postwar nihilism and with failures; he painted both Twain and James as the victims of a hostile materialistic civilization.[22]

The immediate effect of Brooks's theory of "ordealism" was a rush to the defense of the famous writer:

> Reacting to the contention of Van Wyck Brooks in *The Ordeal of Mark Twain* that bourgeois materialism and respectability combined with the afflictions of a mother and wife, accounted for the frustration of Twain's genius, Bernard DeVoto in *Mark Twain's America* argued a natural and inevitable evolution.[23]

Mr. DeVoto launched a direct attack upon Mr. Brooks's theories in his book, which he boldly subtitled *An Essay in the Correction of Ideas*. Disclaiming any personal interest in psychological, political, economic, or evangelistic views,

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[20] Macdonald, p. 167.

[21] *On Native Grounds* (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1956), p. 211.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 141.

[23] Gerhard Friedrich, "Erosion of Values in Mark Twain's Humor," *The CEA Critic*, XXII (September 1960), 1.

he wrote of Brooks:

> One who undertakes to psycho-analyze literature must be a competent psycho-analyst. Mr. Brooks is not![24]

He also accused the "ordeal" theorist not only of trying to prove that Twain was largely ignorant of literature, but also of setting up erroneous ideas which would be misleading to other critics. Mr. DeVoto proceeded to say that scholars would do better to read the source, Twain himself, than to rely on other critics' opinions.

Mark Twain's America is a detailed study of the Mississippi Valley in the 1840's and 1850's, the influential world of Sam Clemens' youth. The Central Valley and its varied life was the matrix of Twain's art of folk humor. Historian DeVoto pictured him as a frontier humorist whose main purpose was to make people laugh. He recognized Twain as a western spokesman for a democratic country. In his Preface he stated that his effort had been "to perceive where and how Mark Twain's books issue from American life."[25] This representation of the humorist as essentially a Western writer was further developed in later DeVoto works. As a result the fashion for accenting Twain's western background was popular for more than a decade.

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[24] *Mark Twain's America* (Chautauqua, New York: Chautauqua Institutions, 1932, 1933), pp. 227-228.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 1.

Mr. DeVoto's hope that scholars would take a closer look at source materials was gradually fulfilled in the ensuing years. Nevertheless, the immediate effects of the famed debate had been to divert attention from Twain's works to his personality, thus delaying the estimate of him as a literary artist. However, as Henry Nash Smith indicated, the "tendentious but challenging" Ordeal, and Mark Twain's America, its "bellicose rejoinder," had brought critical discussion "into relation with central issues of American intellectual life and demonstrated by example that Mark Twain deserved serious study."[26] Thus, the first fruits of this battle, surprisingly enough, were long lasting; this colorful period left its mark upon all future Twain scholarship. As Malcolm Cowley remarked, "I can testify from experience, however, that the climate of literature seemed different after Brooks had spoken."[27]

The outcome of the debate was long delayed, but actually resulted in each author making concessions; each toned down his narrow view of Twain, and both came closer to agreement in subsequent publications. "The antagonists neatly changed places," Macdonald noted.[28] Regarding the

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[26]"Boyhood of Mark Twain," Nation, September 27, 1952, p. 274.

[27]"Brooks's Mark Twain: Thirty-Five Years After," New Republic, June 20, 1955, p. 18.

[28]Macdonald, p. 168.

change in Brooks's attitude, Charles Glicksberg wrote:

> He no longer believes in the value of the psychoanalytic method as applied to the writing of biography, thus rendering dubious the validity of his books on Henry James and Mark Twain. Though he has not abandoned his scholastic ideals, his sympathies are ethical and humanitarian rather than narrowly economic and doctrinaire.[29]

A few liberal, socially oriented critics echoed early Brooksian ideas. Granville Hicks said that Mark Twain accomplished "a good deal less than, all things considered, he had given promise of doing."[30] Another critic of the thirties, Vernon L. Parrington, wrote in florid style:

> He could not throw off the frontier--its psychology and its morality were too deeply intertwined with his primitive self; and the result was a harrassing inner conflict that left him maimed. Yet with all his shortcomings--because of them indeed--Mark Twain is an immensely significant American document. He is a mirror reflecting the muddy crosscurrents of American life as the frontier spirit washed in, submerging the old aristocratic landmarks. To know Mark Twain is to know the strange and puzzling contradictions of the Gilded Age.[31]

V.F. Calverton expressed an about-face in critical direction:

> The Mark Twain we are interested in . . . the Mark Twain who is important to American literature, is the early Mark Twain . . . and not the older Mark Twain . . .

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[29]<u>American Literary Criticism, 1900-1950</u> (New York: Hendricks House, Inc., 1951), p. 143.

[30]<u>Mark Twain: Selected Criticism</u>, ed. Scott, p. 222.

[31]<u>The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America, 1860-1900</u> (Vol. III of <u>Main Currents in American Thought</u>, 3 vols.; New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930), 88.

> What Is Man?, for example, voicing the disenchantment of spirit that overcame him toward the end of his life, is a revealing philosophic exercise but nothing more.32

With the publication in the 1930's of works by Constance Rourke and Walter Blair, the study of American Humor received special consideration. Miss Rourke's personal opinion was that Mark Twain "was primarily a raconteur . . . never the conscious artist, always the improviser. He had the garrulity and the inconsequence of the earlier comic story-tellers of the stage and tavern; and his comic sense was theirs almost without alteration."[33] Diametrically opposed to this opinion, Walter Blair praised the dialogue of Twain's characters: ". . . their talk, it should be noted, had the precision, the imagination, of poetic art . . . . American humor gave Mark Twain his materials, his methods, and his inspiration. His success was merely the working out of its attempted achievements on the level of genius."[34] Such diverse viewpoints have been characteristic of Twain criticism and always stimulating to scholarship.

Three important books appeared in the period of the

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[32]Mark Twain: Selected Criticism, ed. Scott, p. 209.

[33]American Humor, A Study of the National Character (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, Inc., 1931), p. 211.

[34]Blair, Native American Humor (1800-1900) (New York: American Book Company, 1937), p. 162.

Mark Twain Centenary in 1935. The year before the official celebration, Minnie M. Brashear's book, Mark Twain, Son of Missouri, was published. This scholarly work counter-balances the extreme "frontier" emphasis of DeVoto with a recognition of European cultural influences, especially in Twain's extensive reading. Miss Brashear's detailed study of the reading habits of Mark Twain brought about a new respect for him among scholars, many of whom had patronizingly considered him merely a frontier humorist.[35] In 1935 Edward Wagenknecht, another devoted Twain scholar of that period, set forth in Mark Twain: The Man and His Work[36] his major thesis that Twain, even more than most men, was identified in his work. One of the first to take for granted that Twain was a literary artist of importance, Wagenknecht, in a chapter entitled "The Divine Amateur," nevertheless made the distinction that Twain, as a product of the frontier, was necessarily a folk writer, not a conscious artist.[37] Commenting upon Wagenknecht's mediatory rather than judicial position

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[35]Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1934, p. vii. In regard to the critical controversies Brooks and DeVoto fostered, she wrote ". . . to no one would the contradictions in the interpretations appearing since his death have been so real and so impossible to solve; for in the end the humorist 'eluded himself.'"

[36]New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935.

[37]Wagenknecht, pp. 57-80.

in controversial matters, Robert Spiller said in his review of the book in 1936: "Mark Twain criticism has been in need of the soothing hand of an impartial judge for some time."[38] Albert Bigelow Paine continued the refutation of some of Brooks's theories with the publication of Mark Twain's Notebook. Of the excerpts from Twain's private notebooks and journals included in this work, Paine wrote that "the entries . . . bring us about as near as we shall ever get to this remarkable man, easily the most remarkable of his time." Paine's reply to Brooks in the Foreword of this work was aimed at clearing up the question of whether Olivia Clemens and W.D. Howells in the role of "genteel" tutors had bowdlerized Twain's talent with their editing and advice. Paine firmly stated his opinion that the assistance of Twain's wife and friend was helpful, and not a hindrance.[39]

Carl Van Doren, still wrestling with this important question in 1940, sided with Brooks in his statement that the "classical-minded" Howells and Twain's "fastidious" wife

> . . . contrived to repress some of his tendencies, those toward blasphemy, profanity, the wilder sorts of impossibility, and also toward satire and plain-speaking. How far Mark Twain was shorn by his wife

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[38]Spiller, rev. of Edward Wagenknecht, Mark Twain: The Man and His Work, American Literature, VIII (March 1936), 96.

[39]New York: Harper & Brothers, 1935, p. xi.

> and Howells of real power none can say till his suppressed manuscripts have been studied more thoroughly than they yet have been.40

Several years later another researcher noted how Livy, Susy, and Clara all helped to edit Twain's manuscripts, adding that in the summer of 1883 the author teased the women in his household by deliberately inserting atrocious remarks in anticipation of prompt deletion.[41] By 1960 new research had finally proven that "Livy Clemens as domestic dragon no longer exists . . . ."[42]

Many appreciative studies of Mark Twain appeared in the thirties and forties, dealing with his personal life, his western experiences, his literary reputation, and other aspects of the man and his work. His daughter Clara wrote a volume of reminiscences[43] and the son of his partner in the Charles L. Webster Publishing Company shed light on his business ventures.[44] Accenting his western experiences

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[40]Carl Van Doren, The American Novel (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1940), p. 144.

[41]Guy A. Cardwell, Twins of Genius (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1953), pp. 69-76.

[42]Edward F. Grier, rev. of Samuel Clemens, Mark Twain-Howells Letters (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1960), Journal of the Central Mississippi Valley American Studies Association, I (Fall 1960), 46.

[43]Clara Clemens, My Father, Mark Twain (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1931).

[44]Samuel C. Webster, ed. Mark Twain, Business Man (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1946).

were two writers, Ivan Benson[45] and Franklin D. Walker.[46] The latter emphasized the literary climate of the West Coast in the mid-nineteenth century as a major influence in the work of such men as Bret Harte, Ambrose Bierce, Joaquin Miller, and Mark Twain.

Bernard DeVoto, who had succeeded Albert Bigelow Paine as the literary editor of the Mark Twain Estate, brought out his version of Twain's autobiography with the unfortunate title, _Mark Twain in Eruption_.[47] He added two more books in the forties: _Mark Twain at Work_[48] in which he complained of Twain's sporadic method of composition, and his unevenness; and _The Portable Mark Twain_[49] in which he stated that Twain's work was more the result of inspiration than of conscious effort. Dixon Wecter, who followed DeVoto as the third

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[45] _Mark Twain's Western Years, Together with Hitherto Unprinted Clemens Western Items_ (Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press, 1938).

[46] _San Francisco's Literary Frontier_ (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1939).

[47] New York: Harper & Brothers, 1940. Mr. DeVoto said that the Paine edition of the _Autobiography_ had used about one-fourth of the available material; he had added another fourth in this edition, and half the material remained unpublished.

[48] Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1942.

[49] New York: The Viking Press, 1946.

editor of the Mark Twain Estate, published two books of Twain's correspondence in 1949[50] and was engaged in research on a projected two-volume Twain study before his death.[51]

The most important addition to the critical literature of the decade was DeLancey Ferguson's perceptive study, _Mark Twain: Man and Legend_,[52] a significant biography. Ferguson's meticulous investigation of the early manuscripts of _Huckleberry Finn_ and _The Innocents Abroad_ convinced him that Twain's notations and changes indicated the work of a skilled craftsman. This biography with its emphasis on Twain's career as a writer is still considered by scholars to be one of the best of the full-length studies. It opened a broad new field for critical discussion. The modern viewpoint places emphasis more properly on Twain's place in the creation of an American prose-fiction style.

Except for Ferguson, Blair, Wagenknecht, and one or two others who foreshadowed more-informed modern criticism,

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[50] _The Love Letters of Mark Twain_ (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949); _Mark Twain to Mrs. Fairbanks_ (San Marino, California: Huntington Library Publications, 1949). Wecter's _Mark Twain: Man in Three Moods_ was also a Huntington Library publication in 1948.

[51] _Sam Clemens of Hannibal_ (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1952), was the only part of the projected study completed before Wecter's untimely death.

[52] New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1943.

other critics seemed to have blindly followed particular interests of their own. Perhaps they lacked the sense of humor necessary to appreciate their subject. Many of the more absurd responses of the earlier critics were the result of a too-literal reading of the text; the critics sometimes forgot that *l'exactitude n'est pas la vérité*. Rather, in the manner of the old fable, they felt the elephant's foreleg and concluded that "here is a beast that does, indeed, look like a tree."

Reviewed as a whole, the major comments in books, anthologies, and periodicals of the period 1910 to 1950 show, with few exceptions, that the critics either reserved judgment on Twain's place in literature or were outwardly hostile toward his works. Regardless of the method favored by individual critics, whether historical, psychological, or sociological in approach, the conclusions reached were remarkably alike. The consensus was that Twain had not accomplished what he had given promise of doing because he had been "frustrated" or "maimed" by conflicts within himself or with a genteel society; he was "crude," a "frontier humorist," a "thwarted Swift," a "stultified Rabelais," a "comic Whitman," a "phunny phellow," a "man groping in the dark," and so on.

Twain himself would surely enjoy the battles being waged over him. He once gave this outspoken view of the

critic:

> I believe that the trade of critic in literature, music or the drama is the most degrading of all trades and that it has no real value--certainly no large value.[53]

During his lifetime Twain was prepared for the critics, as Leslie Fiedler points out:

> Between every aspiring critic and Twain stands the author's warning posted before the beginning of his greatest book: "Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished . . . ."[54]

The year 1950 marked a new high in Twain scholarship with the publication of major works by Andrews, Bellamy, and Branch, and essays on Twain's technique by T.S. Eliot and Lionel Trilling, emphasizing that Twain deserved praise as a literary artist and commenting with enthusiasm and insight upon the writer's later works. The critics had achieved the proper perspective, and they began to realize that Twain's genius _had_ flowered, and he _was_ a conscious literary craftsman as well as a thoughtful critic of society whose succinct apothegms on man's predicament were timeless. This appropriate year has been chosen as the starting point for the mid-century look at Mark Twain in this paper.

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[53]Clemens, _The Autobiography of Mark Twain_, ed. Charles Neider (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), p. 274.

[54]_Contemporary Literary Scholarship_, ed. Lewis Leary (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1958), p. 183.

CHAPTER THREE

POPULARITY

A neo-Aristotelian movement which unites the work of scholar and critic has supplanted methods of the past. It lends strength to modern judgment of all forms of art. The fact must not be overlooked, however, that not only the scholar-critic but also the general reader forms independent views toward any literary work. The comments of the formal critic, who often feels that literature is his rightful and exclusive domain, nevertheless, are influenced by the reaction of the non-technical reader, who helps shape the literary fashion of his time. The formation of literary taste in any period is largely the result of the general viewpoint rather than the specific one. The popular modes endorsed by the age affect the critical authorities, as they in turn hope to guide the taste of the time.[1] An examination of the popular image of Mark Twain in the milieu of the twentieth century, therefore, will be undertaken before attempting to evaluate the scholarly image.

This chapter will enumerate some of the reasons for Mark Twain's present-day popularity and some of the avenues

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[1]This idea is discussed by René Wellek in "Literary Theory, Criticism, and History," Sewanee Review, LXVIII (January-March 1960), 1-19.

of expression it has taken: a listing of non-technical books and feature articles, short reviews of some dramatizations, and a visiting list of Twain memorials and shrines. This composite image, made up of a myriad of reflections of himself and his fictional characters on the legitimate stage, video and cinema screens, the pages of books and periodicals, as well as in the minds of readers, provides an index of popular taste.

"Our national past is now very much in fashion," Dwight Macdonald observes.[2] Faced with weakening family ties and a multitude of uncertainties, Americans are enjoying a nostalgic search for "the good life" of one hundred years ago. Current entertainment fare capitalizes on this yearning for yesteryear by offering a profusion of books and films on America's frontier period of expansion and adventure. Lewis Leary has shown how the common attitude toward Mark Twain as "a shaggy man who told stories of boyhood adventures" is a part of what Americans like to believe of their ancestors: "His is the image of what they like to think that Americans have been or can be: humorously perceptive, undeceived by sham, successful in spite of circumstance because of distinctive personal characteristics."[3]

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[2]Dwight Macdonald, "Mark Twain: An Unsentimental Journey," The New Yorker, April 9, 1960, p. 164.

[3]Lewis Leary, Mark Twain (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1960), p. 5.

As a rule the popular image of Twain emphasizes these virtues and tends to overlook the writer's dark outlook of later years. This is the chief criticism made of Charles Neider's editing of the Autobiography.[4] One critic says:

> Stagehands like Mr. Neider have long been at work on the figure of Mark Twain, turning up the lights to get rid of the frightening shadows--for without such adjustments it is difficult not to see Twain's own life as one of desperation, however unquiet. The strategy is to concentrate on the early Twain.5

By concentrating on the early period, the creators of the mass-media image of Twain have turned the great artist into a period piece, the harmless cracker-barrel philosopher dispensing wit and wisdom. This sort of picture promotes the nostalgic feeling of Americans and shamefully neglects the author's serious side. It is ironical that the very world Twain satirized is the one modern Americans are attempting to reconstruct.

As a man accustomed to fame in his own day (he was so well-known that letters addressed to him as "Mark Twain, Somewhere," or "Mark Twain, God Knows Where" were promptly delivered), Twain would no doubt take pride in the outburst of popular acclaim in the decade of the nineteen-fifties.

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[4]Clemens, The Autobiography of Mark Twain ed. Charles Neider (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959).

[5]Macdonald, p. 164.

> Whenever producers, publishers, and editors gather there is no problem more epidemic than how to wring another profitable item out of Twain's spectacular personality or out of his writings.[6]

Publishers planned features for magazines and prepared several popularized books on Mark Twain, not only to take advantage of the anniversary celebration but also to pay tribute to one of the most beloved of American writers. News magazines took note of the revival of popular interest: Newsweek's cover story announced "America Rediscovers Mark Twain," and presented a three-page illustrated special report on the boom in Twain business. The editor asked, "Watching himself turn into the toast of the nation again--as he did in life--would Twain see honesty in his present-day image?"[7] Look magazine, anticipating the publication of Milton Meltzer's picture history, Mark Twain Himself, devoted over ten pages to an illustrated article emphasizing the homey details of his life.[8] In the same month Coronet followed the trend by presenting a thirty-five-page picture story, using photographs; these photos were later included in an hour-long television commemorative tribute to the author.[9] Details of Mark Twain's career have

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[6] Leslie Hanscom, "Mark Twain: A Yearning for Yesterday," Newsweek, May 2, 1960, p. 51.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Milton Meltzer, "Mark Twain," Look, May 10, 1960, pp. 40-51.

[9] Richard Hanser, "Mark Twain's America," Coronet, May 1960, pp. 111-145.

always made excellent copy; editors regularly run anecdotes, jokes, and maxims in the pages of their newspapers and magazines. Condensations of his own works or articles about him have appeared in several publications in recent years.[10]

Popularized biographies have attracted the general reader. One of these, Jerry Allen's The Adventures of Mark Twain,[11] is an attempt to combine a biographical narration of Samuel Langhorne Clemens with a study of his social criticism. By treating her work as a novel without documentation, Miss Allen has incurred unfavorable criticism from Twain scholars, Edward Wagenknecht and Arthur Scott. According to Wagenknecht the work is not unified and does not seem to fill any particular purpose.[12] Scott placed this dramatized story of Twain's life in the juvenile category of books.[13] Another general biography published in the anniversary year was Mark Twain, Family Man, a study of family life in the Twain household by

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[10]See Mark Twain, "My Platonic Sweetheart," excerpts from The Mysterious Stranger and Other Stories, Readers' Digest, November 1953, pp. 79-82; and Donald Day, ed. "Mark--His Words," excerpts from "What Our Ancestors Laughed At," Readers' Digest, May 1954, p. 106.

[11]Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1954.

[12]"World of Huck's Dad," Saturday Review, May 29,1954, p. 15.

[13]Arthur L. Scott, "Mark Twain Today," Journal of the Central Mississippi Valley American Studies Association, I (Fall 1960), 4.

Caroline Thomas Harnsberger, a Twain researcher for many years.[14] Mrs. Harnsberger's acquaintance with Clara Clemens Gabrilowitsch (now Mrs. Jacques Samossoud) gave her access to much personal material. For instance, an amusing excerpt from Twain's "The Children's Record" describing a series of wet-nurses for the infant Clara, called "The Bay," is one of the previously unpublished anecdotes she includes. Charles Neider's edition of Mark Twain's *Autobiography* also seems to have been planned for the general reader, so far as selection of material is concerned.[15] The volume includes sixteen pages of photographs and few editorial notes; it lacks chapter titles, so that locating specific segments in the work would be difficult for the scholar. Neider also edited a gift-trade volume of Twain selections, *The Travels of Mark Twain* (covering the years 1893 to 1907).[16] Another kind of biography is Milton Meltzer's handsome volume, *Mark Twain, Himself: A Pictorial Biography*, which is a skillful blend of editorial comment and Twain's own words taken from a variety of his writings, and supplemented with six hundred prints, drawings, and photographs. This chronologically arranged "portrait" brings to life the popular hero as printer,

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[14] *Mark Twain, Family Man* (New York: Citadel Press, 1960).

[15] See note 4, above.

[16] New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1961.

pilot, reporter, author, and lecturer. Commenting upon the problem of selection of material, Meltzer observed, "Of course this book cannot pretend to include everything. Mark Twain is a big territory to roam around in."[17]

Perhaps the most useful book of the decade for the general reader's introduction to Twain is The Art, Humor, and Humanity of Mark Twain, edited by two Twain specialists, Minnie M. Brashear and Robert M. Rodney.[18] The editors have focused attention not only upon the autobiographical material, but also upon his better-known writings, including many complete stories and anecdotes. The last part of this work provides the reader with a generous sampling of the author's epigrams, and a helpful "Chronology of Mark Twain's Life and Literary Career." The addition of thoughtful, critical commentary, a selected bibliography, and the stimulating introduction by Edward Wagenknecht, makes this work of interest to the specialized reader as well. The Preface proposes the question, "What, essentially, was Mark Twain?" and adds:

> The present editors believe that a close examination of the man's life and the reading of a representative cross-section of his work will reveal that Mark Twain was essentially a fine literary artist . . . a great humorist . . . a shrewd observer of life and human nature 19

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[17] Mark Twain Himself (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1960), p. vii.

[18] Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959.

[19] Ibid., p. xviii.

At the Mark Twain Anniversary Meeting of the Central Mississippi Valley American Studies Association, Arthur L. Scott told his audience:

> Mark Twain today would not be the big business he is, were he not the best beloved man of letters yet produced by the United States.[20]

One indication that "The Belle of New York" is big business today is the number of memorials to him in several American towns. A visiting list of the museums, libraries, and shrines commemorating Mark Twain would include Hannibal and Florida, Missouri; Virginia City, Nevada; Elmira, New York; and Hartford and Redding, Connecticut. Probably the favorite tourist attraction is Hannibal, where visitors may see the Clemens family home, the Becky Thatcher house, and The Mark Twain Museum.[21] Forty miles from Hannibal is the Mark Twain State Park, where a modernistic memorial shrine, dedicated June 5, 1960, encloses the cabin which was the writer's birthplace in Florida, Missouri. Here also one may see material collected by the Mark Twain Research Foundation.[22]

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[20] See a digest of Scott's talk, "Mark Twain Today," in the Journal of the CMVASA, I (Fall 1960), 2-10.

[21] For illustrated tour articles see Jerry Allen, "Tom Sawyer's Town," National Geographic Magazine, July 1956, pp. 120-140; and "Visiting Mark Twain's Hannibal," Travel, May 1960, pp. 39-41.

[22] Over 200,000 tourists visited the Mark Twain Memorial Shrine in 1960. See Sando Bologna, "Marked for Twain," Travel, May 1960, pp. 48-50.

Visitors may now tour the partially restored Clemens mansion in "the handsomest town," as Twain dubbed Hartford on his first visit in 1868. The elaborate Gothic home at 351 Farmington Avenue, with its unconventional architecture (Twain had a porch resembling the bow of a Mississippi River steamer, a pilothouse balcony, and a pilot's cabin dressing room incorporated in the design), is under the care of the Mark Twain Library and Memorial Commission.[23] And in New York on what is now the Elmira College campus, Twain's octagonal hilltop study at Quarry Farm, where he worked on _Tom Sawyer_, _Huckleberry Finn_, _The Prince and the Pauper_, _A Connecticut Yankee_, _Life on the Mississippi_, and _A Tramp Abroad_, is open to visitors. The Woodlawn Cemetery where Mark, Olivia, Susy, and Jean are buried is also in Elmira. Mark Twain lived and worked in a great many American towns, as well as abroad, and a complete list of memorials to him would make a sizable tour book in itself.

The most important evidence of Twain's popularity is that all his best works are still in print. Discussing the fanfare of the anniversary year, Arthur Scott said:

> . . . to ignore completely this current acclaim would be foolish, for it represents a world's tribute to a beloved man, whose career still

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[23]See Norman Holmes Pearson, "The Mark Twain Memorial in Hartford, Connecticut," _Journal of the CMVASA_, I (Fall 1960), 11-16.

> makes excellent copy and whose best books "go right on selling like the Bible"--to use his own expression.24

Twain's works have been translated into almost as many languages as the Bible, too.[25] Reprints of his best-known books have been good business in recent years. Twenty-five different editions of *Huckleberry Finn* alone came from American presses in 1959; a conservative estimate of *Huck* sales to date would be 10,000,000 copies. In 1960 ten major American publishing houses handled reprints of this great novel. In addition to book sales, the circulation of Twain's books in public libraries is heavy; Twain leads all others as the favorite nineteenth-century American author. Charles H. Crompton concluded, after questioning librarians in five metropolitan areas, that "if St. Louis is typical of other parts of America, Mark Twain is today the most widely read American author, living or dead."[26]

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[24] Scott, "Mark Twain Today," p. 2. Scott notes, pp. 7, 5, that business of the Estate has provided Clara Clemens Samossoud with an income in the last few years which ranges from $22,000 to $38,000 a year. (In 1960 she received $50,036.) Commenting on the value of Twainiana, Scott added that a single stray notebook that Twain had carried in his pocket brought $25,000 at auction in the Spring of 1960.

[25] See an account of translations and editions of *Huck* in Blair, chap. 26, "Hucka, Khŏk, Hunckle, Gekkelberri . . . ," *Mark Twain and Huck Finn*, pp. 371-384.

[26] As quoted by Blair, *Mark Twain and Huck Finn*, p. 374.

No less than four major television shows presented a range of Twain material between April 22 and May 13 in 1960. Franchot Tone starred in a show based on Twain's lecture tours of 1895-1905;[27] Ernie Ford burlesqued A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court;[28] James Daly was presented in a dramatization of Roughing It;[29] and NBC presented an hour-long feature on "Mark Twain's America," an historical review of Twain's life concentrating on the "dark years" and using over one thousand photographs to give a realistic picture of that era.[30] As a rule these dramatized excerpts from the humorist's works, once subjected to the needs and ideas of the producer, are no longer recognizable as vintage Twain; characters are modified, added, or deleted to suit the producer's fancy. The latest of several Huck Finn films, a wide-screen version released in 1960, was thought by most serious critics to have been a failure, so far as authenticity was concerned.[31] Hollywood has not produced a

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[27]Horton Foote, "The Shape of the River," Playhouse 90, May 2, 1960.

[28]Ford Startime Special, May 10, 1960.

[29]May 13, 1960.

[30]Project 20 Special, April 22, 1960; for reviews see Hanscom, p. 51; and "Sam's Comeback," Time, May 2, 1960, pp. 62, 67.

[31]See an unfavorable rev. of a video Huck in R.L. Shayon, "Which Twin Had the Twain?" Saturday Review, December 21, 1957, p. 28.

definitive Huckleberry Finn, but visitors may see in Disneyland a re-creation of Tom Sawyer's Island, Huck's raft, and a paddle-wheeler named Mark Twain.

Because Twain's verbal style with its high percentage of dialogue makes "good theater," many dramatizations for radio, television, and the legitimate stage have been published.[32] Tom Sawyer and The Prince and the Pauper (the latter once dramatized by the Clemens children as a Christmas entertainment in Hartford) have been popular with amateur and professional groups for many years in America and elsewhere.[33] Patrons of the legitimate theater enjoyed drama with the old master's touch in the 1959 off-Broadway production of Mark Twain Tonight! This brilliant re-creation of the celebrated author as a septagenarian platform lecturer was the work of a young actor, Hal Holbrook. His careful preparation for the role over a twelve-year period paid off handsomely when he successfully arranged for the opening of his one-man show in April, just at the crest of a new tide of interest in Twain. Contrary to the usual mishandling of Twain material in the entertainment world, Holbrook smoothly combined excerpts of the

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[32]For published versions of plays see Elizabeth Brenner, "The Prince and the Pauper," Plays, January 1960, pp. 47-56; and Lewy Olfson, "Tom Sawyer and Injun Joe," Plays, April 1959, pp. 87-95.

[33]Hanscom, p. 52, notes that Tom Sawyer is a familiar figure in the Soviet theater repertory today.

author's tales, anecdotes, novels, and autobiographical material with careful regard for authenticity.[34]

Mark Twain Tonight! played a six-month engagement in New York before Holbrook began a coast-to-coast tour of his play in seventy-five major cities of the United States. Later he took it to Asia under the auspices of the State Department. A phonograph recording of some of the readings has been made, and Holbrook wrote a book about his experiences acting the famous role.[35] The actor describes his interpretation of Twain's comic style:

> The most striking factor in the humorous style of Mark Twain is that he delivered his comic block-busters with the innocent air of a man who does not realize he has said anything funny.[36]

To observe the authenticity of the Holbrook portrait, this comment might be compared with a description of an actual Twain performance:

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[34]Comments of the critics were unanimously favorable: ". . . the evening begins showering comic sparks," from "Mark Twain Tonight!" *Time*, April 20, 1959, p. 7; and "one of the biggest surprises of the New York theater this season," said "Broadway's Mark Twain," *Newsweek*, June 1, 1959, p. 58. Tom Prideaux, "Twain's Amazing Twin," *Life*, October 19, 1959, p. 83, commenting upon the balance of selections used, said that Holbrook "illuminates the paradoxes of Twain's character--his boyish desire to be approved by the same world he derided, his Jovian good humor streaked with hidden despairs."

[35]Holbrook, *Mark Twain Tonight!: An Actor's Portrait* (New York: Ives Washburn, Inc., 1959).

[36]*Ibid.*, p. 41.

> Now he enters, the most celebrated wag of two continents. He gives his hand to an old gentleman, and at once this man laughs heartily, the laughter suffusing the entire staid, rigid old face. I am convinced that all Mark Twain said to him was, "Hello!" But can Mark Twain say anything that would not be funny? 37

Thus, fifty years after the death of the "celebrated wag," an actor has presented a fabulist and has recaptured a bit of Americana which feeds modern man's nostalgia. Such a characterization is, perhaps, the one the public most likes to remember of the creator of their favorite childhood heroes, Tom and Huck. But undoubtedly even the non-critical estimation of Twain today includes the realization that here are works which bear re-examination by the adult reader--the only one who can fully appreciate their deeper meanings. This phenomenon--the appeal to young and old, to all kinds of people--is the key to Twain's popularity.

The activity recorded in this chapter has served not only as a tribute to a great literary figure, but also as a stimulant to a more-inquiring reappraisal of the personality of Mark Twain. One direction in which mid-century criticism is moving is toward a deeper exploration of the paradoxes of his nature.

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[37]Theodor Herzl, "Mark Twain and the British Ladies; a Feuilleton," trans. Alfred Werner, Commentary, September 1959, p. 244. For another look at Twain on the platform see Paul Fatout, Mark Twain on the Lecture Circuit (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1960).

CHAPTER FOUR

PERSONALITY

The sensitive nature of Mark Twain's character has long made his complex personality an object of debate among the pscyhologically oriented critics. Moreover, all critics are quick to point out the paradoxes in his work and to note that even early in his writing career his humor was streaked with despair. From the moment when he first won fame he began to desire the approval of the very world he derided. And, as the most popular literary showman of his own time, he played the role of public performer so intently that he, himself, sometimes had difficulty in distinguishing which was Mark Twain and which was Samuel Clemens. The inevitable dichotomy inherent in the requirements of his life and career has always intrigued the critics. In this chapter some of the attitudes that critics who employ Freudian psychology in their literary interpretations exhibit toward Mark Twain will be explored.

The term psychoanalysis is freely used by critics to indicate the application of Freud's analytic method to specific works of art or to the artist himself. Psychoanalysis of the artist, of course, is neither the invention nor the sole property of the mid-twentieth-century critic.

The extremely subjective outlook of the Romantic literature had invited critical judgment which concentrated on the personality of the artist. Later, the creation of a dynamic psychology by Sigmund Freud fostered the growth of interest in the theories of personality. And Freud's hypothesis of the unconscious, first clearly formulated at the turn of the century, led to a belief in the essential neuroticism of the artist, a theory still prevalent in critical literature today. While acknowledging the importance of Freudian concepts in relation to literature, Lionel Trilling regrets that later critics, misinterpreting Freud's statements about neurosis, developed the myth of the sick artist:

> The current literary conception of neurosis as a *wound* is quite misleading. It inevitably suggests passivity, whereas, if we follow Freud, we must understand a neurosis to be an *activity*, an activity with a purpose, and a particular kind of activity, a *conflict*.[1]

The wounded-artist theory, as shown in Chapter Two, appealed to such critics as Van Wyck Brooks, who used a psychoanalytic approach to literary biography in his studies of Twain and James. Other biographers of the twenties viewed the work of the artist as a vehicle for the psychoanalytic examination of its neurotic producer; notable examples were Joseph Wood Krutch's study of Poe and Lewis Mumford's life

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[1]Trilling, "Art and Neurosis," *The Liberal Imagination* (New York: The Viking Press, 1950), p. 177.

of Melville. This kind of analysis attempted to discover abnormalities of personality or events in the artist's background which could account for his accomplishments and failures. Today these older studies are sometimes considered naïve or unrewarding by later interpreters of Freud.

Recent anthropological discoveries, together with modifications of Freudian theories by Jung and others in the forties and fifties, gave psychological criticism a broader understanding and developed a new theory of myth among the critics.[2] Present-day critics who follow Jung's theories accent symbol, ritual, and myth in the artist's work as outward signs of the inner losses the artist may have suffered. However, an important reservation needs to be kept in mind by the psychological critic:

> If we approach literature exclusively by way of the writer's personality, psychoanalytically considered, we not only get even farther away from the real experience of literature than we were before, but we obliterate even the fundamental cultural respect for the health of the creative self in our eagerness to label the writer ill.[3]

Nevertheless, the critic and the general public alike

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[2]Alfred Kazin, "Psychoanalysis and Literary Culture Today," Partisan Review, XXVI (Winter 1959), 50.

[3]Ibid., 53.

accept the theory that the creative artist is inherently neurotic, and that he is most successful when he is able to objectify his neurosis in his work.

Mark Twain, with his many idiosyncrasies, his exaggerated behavior, and his acute sensibility to the world around him, has been a favorite subject of psychoanalytical investigation.

> There is no doubt that Mark Twain's imagination was profoundly affected by the doubleness of his personality and the contradictoriness of his feelings and opinions. He was a gay farceur and a saddened cynic, a romancer and a pessimistic determinist, a raffish westerner and a "candidate for gentility," a radical democrat and a hobnobber with Standard Oil executives, a disinterested genius and a commercial opportunist, an author who liked to project his own divided character by portraying twins and dealing with mistaken identities.[4]

As a writer Twain worked at two levels: some of his work was produced just to meet the public demand, and other pieces were written largely to please himself. Like Byron, Balzac, and Dickens, Mark Twain quickly turned out books and articles for the insatiable market, usually with the prospect of making money on them. His finest works, on the other hand, often required years of labor and extensive revision before he was even partially satisfied with them. His most effective writing was achieved when he side-stepped the requirements of public personality and wrote of his

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[4]Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1957), p. 149.

private convictions.

In his lifetime Mark Twain was both adored for his delightful personality and disliked for his well-known temper. His brother Orion described Samuel as a "rugged, brave, quick-tempered, generous-hearted fellow."[5] Twain reflected many of his family's characteristics in his own often-impulsive behavior, and in his delight in material comforts. Walter Blair, in reviewing Dixon Wecter's _Sam Clemens of Hannibal_, wrote:

> The depiction of his family--out-at-elbow, satanically proud, always desperately leaping into wildcat ventures--explains, for instance, Twain's lifelong affinity for impossible investments and his delight in wealth and splendor.[6]

Mark Twain's sensitive nature made him well aware of his own shortcomings. In a letter to W.D. Howells in which he railed at his Hartford business agent, Whitmore, Twain wrote of his own temper, "I recognize & concede that there is not another temper as bad as mine except God Almighty's."[7] Many of his business associates had felt the sting of his anger. A junior editor of Harper & Brothers who was helping to

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[5]As quoted by Dixon Wecter, _Sam Clemens of Hannibal_ (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1952), p. 130.

[6]Blair, "Last of the Jongleurs," _Saturday Review of Literature_, August 30, 1952, pp. 9-10.

[7]Clemens, _Mark Twain-Howells Letters_, eds. Henry Nash Smith and William M. Gibson (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press,1960), I, 710.

revise The Mark Twain Library of Humor under the watchful eyes of the author himself wrote that "Mark Twain was highly skilled in invective, to state the fact in dignified terms."[8] And the author's daughters, too, were well aware of their father's occasional fits of irritation, usually brought on by some misplaced manuscript. Clara said: "He was a constant surprise in his varied moods, which dropped unheralded upon him, creating day or night for those about him by his twinkling eyes, or his clouded brows."[9] As Susy confided in her "Biography of Mark Twain," "He is a very good man and a very funny one. He *has* got a temper, but we all of us have in this family."[10] Such extremes of mood, DeVoto thought, marked a real split in Twain's personality:

> He had a buoyancy which, twinned as it was with gentleness and intuition and art, gave him a personal magnetism which his friends did not hesitate to call enchantment. Yet it altered with an anger that readily became fury and was rooted in a revulsion between disgust and despair. The alternation suggests a basic split; it is clearly marked in his personality and equally evident in his books.11

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[8] Burges Johnson, "A Ghost for Mark Twain," *Atlantic Monthly*, May 1952, p. 66.

[9] As quoted by Caroline Harnsberger, *Mark Twain, Family Man* (New York: Citadel Press, 1960), p. 69.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 70.

[11] DeVoto, ed. *The Portable Mark Twain by Samuel Langhorne Clemens* (New York: The Viking Press, 1946), p. 13.

This "split-personality" suggestion of DeVoto's was popular with several critics of the fifties who became interested in the dual nature of Twain's work. Lewis Leary has shown, however, that the creation of a two-person image in the author-performer's behavior was deliberate:

> For in both a literary and psychological sense the shambling but perceptive humorist remembered as Mark Twain is a mask, a controlled, drawling, and whimsical voice, a posturing and flamboyant figure, behind which exists the man, Samuel Langhorne Clemens, who with the help of circumstance and receptive wit created him.[12]

The artist's need for the development of a public personality has always been important. William Dean Howells paid tribute to his friend's dramatic abilities and his consummate public performances, and on occasions for speeches Twain would often refer unabashedly to the compliments of Howells and others.[13] And Brander Matthews discerningly characterized Twain as "a born actor, a born speech maker, a born story teller."[14]

Conflicting elements in the personality of Mark Twain are evident in his attempts to find what he felt was his

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[12]Leary, Mark Twain (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1960), p. 6.

[13]See Paul Fatout, Mark Twain on the Lecture Circuit (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1960), p. 284.

[14]As quoted by Fatout, p. 288.

proper role during his most productive years.[15] Contradictory ideas may be noted in his revision of the more skeptical letters he had originally written on the Quaker City voyage for the San Francisco Daily Alta Californian.[16] The revised letters were published in 1869 as The Innocents Abroad, a very popular book of foreign travel which presents a rather chaotic mixture of Twain's reverence (he reworked the Holy Land chapters to give a more orthodox Protestant view after the manuscript had been submitted to the publisher) and his boldly stated iconoclasm. Other later works reveal this same contention of roles within the writer: in The Gilded Age the storyteller vies with the satirist for control in the Twain chapters of this collaboration; likewise, in A Tramp Abroad and Life on the Mississippi the role of the journalist clashes with that of the artist.

In addition to noting the "split" in Mark Twain's personal behavior, the critics who used a psychoanalytical approach invariably observed that his extreme sensibility had led to exaggerated feelings of guilt. While some modern

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[15]See Lester Gerald Crossman, "Samuel Clemens in Search of Mark Twain--A Study of Clemens's Changing Conception of His Role as Writer," Dissertation Abstracts, XVIII (1958), 230.

[16]For a reprint of the original letters see Samuel Langhorne Clemens, Traveling with The Innocents Abroad; Mark Twain's Original Reports from Europe and the Holy Land, ed. Daniel M. McKeithan (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958).

critics have felt that Twain's "guilt complex" was acquired early in life, others have attributed it to the effects of later personal tragedies. Henry Seidel Canby's *Turn West, Turn East: Mark Twain and Henry James* includes an analysis of Twain as a "neurotic genius," one whose excessive sensitivity of mind "denies the validity of the creative artist's own genius."[17] This critic adopts the Freudian theory of the indispensability of a certain amount of neuroticism to the writer. He writes that Mark Twain's mind "under its gay fictions must have been sensitive to disillusion from the start. . . . he was born neurotic, which accounts for the brilliant sensitivity which makes his two finest books masterpieces. Yet in the end neuroticism destroyed him as a creative artist."[18] Many critics today feel that Twain suffered throughout most of his life with obsessive feelings of guilt and remorse which began after the deaths of his brother Henry, his son Langdon, and later, his daughter Susy's fatal illness, and his beloved wife's death. His personal sense of guilt was acute; he often accused himself of neglect or of some injustice toward those he most loved.

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[17]Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1951, p. 253. A similar view is expressed by C.O. Parsons in "The Devil and Samuel Clemens," *Virginia Quarterly Review*, XXXII (Autumn 1947), 582-606.

[18]Canby, p. 251.

For example, he wrote to his wife following the death of Susy: ". . . she died where she had spent all her life till my crimes made her a pauper & an exile."[19]

Mark Twain's belief that he was personally to blame for the misfortunes of those about him spread beyond the family circle and included the whole human race. In this sense his "guilt complex" has been interpreted by Leslie Fiedler as a projection of the guilt of slavery.[20] Twain's guilt became linked in his mind with the image of death which he translated to the pages of his novels, where violence, terror, and death are necessary evils in man's world. The later Twain writings and his personal comments in the *Autobiography* are marked by a haunting prescience of death.

The more imaginative psychological critic has seized upon the writer's habit of dressing all in white as an outward manifestation of this "guilt complex," and a disproportionate amount of attention has been given to this idiosyncrasy. Thus the author has been labeled a *laveur* by certain critics who reasoned that, since he wore all-white suits, laundered daily, he must have been seriously hampered by a guilty conscience. The facts reveal, however, that

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[19]Clemens, *The Love Letters of Mark Twain*, ed. Dixon Wecter (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), p. 322.

[20]"Love Letter from the Grave," *New Republic*, May 18, 1959, p. 19.

there were other, more valid reasons for Twain's choice of clothing. Contrary to popular belief today, it was not until the year of Olivia Clemens' death that her husband began to wear white the year around. He had worn white suits during the Quarry Farm summers for years, and his friend Howells also wore fashionable white in warm weather. The Clemens' maid, Katy Leary, recalled that it was when the family moved to Fifth Avenue, New York, that the white-haired author ordered a complete set of all-white haberdashery, fourteen suits, cravats, shoes, and even an all-white dress suit.[21] When the latter, together with a purple cape lined in white silk, was ordered from the tailor, Twain's daughter Clara was scandalized. This fantastic ensemble clearly indicated that its owner had an inordinate love of display, and, being conscious of his fame, felt called upon to dress the part. Mark Twain's love of his blue and crimson Oxford gown, which he wore over a white suit for Clara's wedding, is a familiar story. DeLancey Ferguson, in discussing the white costume, correctly places emphasis upon Twain's flamboyant attempts to please his audience and himself:

> The most publicized, because the most public, of Mark's acts after he reached Pier 70 was his decision thenceforth always to dress in white. The reason why most men would have avoided so

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[21]Mary Lawton, _A Lifetime with Mark Twain: The Memories of Katy Leary_ (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1925), p. 269.

> distinguishing themselves--that it would make them conspicuous--was not operative with Mark. That was why he did it.22

Allied with these critical arguments about whether Mark Twain had a conscience heavy with guilt are theories concerning his sexuality. Alexander Jones believes that any study of Mark Twain must eventually deal with the author's remarkable conscience and with the complex causes for his sense of guilt, "a corrosive guilt that gives intensity to his moralistic pronouncements, deepens his pessimism, and adds a sense of urgency to his deterministic denial of man's responsibility for his actions." He suggests as a possible cause "one source which has hitherto been almost completely ignored: sexual conflict."[23] Acknowledging the help of Freudian writings, and of Dixon Wecter's analysis of Sam Clemens' childhood in Hannibal, Missouri, Jones paints a picture of an unstable, nightmare-ridden boy suffering from an Oedipus complex. These psychic turmoils of his youth led Samuel Clemens to marry a woman whom he worshiped as a mother-substitute. Other critics, following Jones's line of reasoning, attach great significance to Olivia Clemens' nickname for her husband, "Youth." DeVoto inferred that

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[22]DeLancey Ferguson, Mark Twain: Man and Legend (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1943), p. 308.

[23]Jones, "Mark Twain and Sexuality," PMLA, LXXI (September 1956), 595.

this endearing name pictures the author as a misbehaving little boy.

Mark Twain's selection of a mate in the romantic manner he employed is thought by some critics to be an indication of prudery. DeVoto claimed that Twain sought out Olivia Langdon, knowing she was a semi-invalid and a puritan. Commenting on Twain's exclusion of sex from his books (women seldom have husbands, nor men wives, unless the couples are beyond middle-age), DeVoto pointed out that "sex seems to be forbidden unless it can be treated mawkishly . . . ."[24] Much of DeVoto's view on the treatment of women and sex in Twain's writings is shared by Jones, who discusses the Clemens marriage in typical psychological jargon: "Nevertheless, the marriage was not completely free from tension: masochistic feelings of guilt began erupting with increased violence from Twain's supersensitive super-ego."[25]

The probable causes for Mark Twain's reticence in writing about sex have been examined extensively by Dixon Wecter, who stated that "Sam Clemens' own family had been curiously undemonstrative, and their neighborhood likewise."[26]

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[24] The Portable Mark Twain (New York: The Viking Press, 1946), p. 18.

[25] Jones, "Mark Twain and Sexuality," p. 605.

[26] Wecter, ed. The Love Letters of Mark Twain, p. 14.

The lack of public expression of sentiment and affection in reserved Hannibal, Wecter believed, accounted for Twain's own minimization of sex in his writings.[27]

> Indeed the absence of sexuality from Mark Twain's published work has roused comment ever since the Freudian era began. Sophomoric bits of bawdry like 1601, written for the delectation of Mark's clerical friend Joe Twichell, the speech to the Stomach Club in Paris on "The Science of Onanism," and the Rabelaisian quatrains now preserved in the Yale College Library, were intended strictly for men only, and his lusty "Letters from the Earth" were never meant for publication. But for the general reader--including the young girl, who, as Mark's friend and censor Howells insisted, was the book consumer par excellence in Victorian America--Mark Twain observed the strictest decorum.28

Mark Twain's attitude toward women was not unlike that of many gentlemen of the Victorian era who felt that their women were delicate and should be cherished and protected as much as possible from life's rougher elements. This consideration may be detected in such works as Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc,[29] Eve's Diary, the fragmentary

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[27]For Wecter's discussion of this subject see Robert E. Spiller and others, eds. The Literary History of the United States (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), II, 917-939.

[28]Sam Clemens of Hannibal, p. 172.

[29]For discussion of "the timeless and sexless quality of Twain's devotion to girlhood," as seen in this work see Albert E. Stone, Jr., "Mark Twain's Joan of Arc: The Child as Goddess," American Literature, XXXI (March 1959), 1-20.

"My Platonic Sweetheart," and the essay "In Defence of Harriet Shelley." In the latter Twain defended "Harriet Shelley's good name," against which "there is not one scrap of tarnishing evidence . . . ." The gallantry with which Mark Twain treated women is apparent in his vindication of the honor of the poet's wife:

> The charge insinuated by these odious slanders is one of the most difficult of all offences to prove; it is also one which no man has a right to mention even in a whisper about any woman, living or dead, unless he knows it to be true, and not even then unless he can also prove it to be true.30

As evidence of Mark Twain's desire to be mothered, the critics cite his many letters to Mary Mason Fairbanks, whom he addressed as "My Dear Forgiving Mother" sometimes, and signed "Your Improving Prodigal," "Your cub," "Your dutiful brick," or simply "Your Son."[31] He met Mrs. Fairbanks, a cultivated amateur penwoman, on the *Quaker City* voyage when he was a young bachelor. Their correspondence over several years was edited by Dixon Wecter, who wrote:

> Her maternal attitude fitted precisely the pattern of Mark Twain's temperament. He enjoyed a touch of feminine domination all his life--believing, with

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[30]"In Defence of Harriet Shelley," in *How to Tell a Story and Other Essays* (*Literary Essays*), *The Writings of Mark Twain*, Author's National Edition (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1899-1922), XXII, 74. All references, unless otherwise specified, will be to this edition.

[31]See Dixon Wecter, ed. *Mark Twain to Mrs. Fairbanks* (San Marino: Huntington Library Publications, 1949).

> the faith characteristic of Victorian and Western America, that woman with her finer sensibilities was the true arbiter of taste, manners, and morals.[32]

One reviewer of these letters said, "He played a role with Mrs. Fairbanks just as every letter-writer does with his correspondent." In this role he became "filially devoted to his 'other mother' and eager to confide, to learn, and to please."[33] Critics who feel that Mark Twain looked upon women most often as mothers usually associate this theory with the idea that he was a boy in a man's world. A reviewer of <u>Report from Paradise</u> thought that Twain's intention in this work was to infuriate "genteel hypocrites," adding:

> He misbehaved out of resentment at feeling himself disqualified, like a boy, in a grown-up world of the mind. The only regrettable thing is that as an artist he could not grow outside the boy's world, away from the boyhood romance.[34]

It is the boyhood of Tom and Huck which has been the most common subject for analysis by the Freudian critics. Huck, according to Fiedler, is "Tom's Noble Savage" in the <u>Tom Sawyer</u> stories--"a sentimentalized id-figure representing the Good Bad Boy's dream of how bully life might be without

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[32] <u>Ibid.</u>, p. xix.

[33] Hobart Halsband, "Clemens and His 'Other Mother,'" <u>Saturday Review of Literature</u>, October 22, 1949, p. 17.

[34] Isaac Rosenfeld, "A Boy's Heaven," <u>New Republic</u>, December 1, 1952, p. 19.

parents, clothing, or school . . . ." Pointing out the change of roles in the two boyhood books, Fiedler writes: "Tom Sawyer is a fable of lost boyhood written by Tom, while Huckleberry Finn is that same fable transcribed by Huck."[35]

Two extreme interpretations of the psychological implications of Huckleberry Finn have been vigorously attacked by critics. In his critique of Fiedler's first book, An End to Innocence,[36] Alfred Kazin writes that among the essays in this volume "there is also a piece of clap-trap, 'Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!' showing that Huckleberry Finn is about homosexual love . . . ." Kazin denounces Fiedler for this "deliberate provocativeness --this air of talking, talking brightly, brashly, penetratingly all the time, no matter what the subject or whom he embarrasses."[37] Another writer whose interpretations of Huck Finn have elicited criticism is Kenneth Lynn. In reviewing Lynn's Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor,[38] writer Wallace

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[35]Leslie Fiedler, "Duplicitous Mark Twain," Commentary, March 1960, pp. 245, 248.

[36]Boston: Beacon Press, 1955.

[37]Kazin, "The Uses of Experience," New Republic, August 29, 1955, p. 20. Fiedler's essay originally appeared in Partisan Review, XV (June 1948), 664-671. Cf. Jones, "Mark Twain and Sexuality," p. 615. "Here at last is guiltless sexuality, innocent sensuality . . . ."

[38]Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1959.

Stegner accuses the author of "building structures of interpretation on a substructure of inference," in reference to Lynn's psychological view of the novel as symbolizing a loss of Eden, and of Huck's journey as a search for a father. And Lynn's theory that the Charles William Allbright episode represents a symbolic rebirth by water is attacked by Stegner, who wishes that "critics with crypto-Freudian reflexes could be kept out of Huck Finn by decree."[39] Another of Lynn's "crypto-Freudian" views which Stegner may have been considering was the idea that because Twain suffered from a fantasy of being locked up and forgotten, he often portrayed alienated characters who feared incarceration--the orphan Tom, and runaways Huck, Joan of Arc, the Prince and the Pauper.[40]

Contrary to the belief that Mark Twain was a boy in a man's world is the evidence presented by recent editors of the Mark Twain Estate, Dixon Wecter and Henry Nash Smith, which reveals that Twain was not immature as some critics liked to suggest. He was, rather, a mature experienced adult, writing with rich insight and deep feeling about the halcyon days of boyhood, capturing every reader's nostalgia for a lost past.

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[39]Stegner, "The Celebrated Jumping Freud," Reporter, March 17, 1960, p. 46.

[40]Lynn, "Huck and Jim," Yale Review, XLVII (Spring 1958), 421-431, a pre-publication of a section of Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor.

Wecter aptly observed, "Whether Americans are a nation stricken with an Oedipus complex, as has often been said in modern times, they are surely sentimentalists about boyhood, as their songs and popular poetry . . . bear witness."[41] Commenting upon Twain's nostalgia, Wecter adds:

> . . . Hannibal was linked in his psyche with the age of innocence, before the unrest of puberty or the burdens and perplexities of adulthood settled upon his shoulders. Hannibal forever remained his symbol of security in days when disasters and frustrations were closing in upon him.[42]

The many personality weaknesses ascribed to Mark Twain by a small group of Freudian critics would seem to present him as a person so wounded by his "split personality," his "guilt complex," and his "sexual taboos," as to be incapable of enjoying a normal, happy life, let alone of achieving the enormous success his accomplishments brought him. Clearly, the narrow view of the specialized critic, who uses literature as a diagnostic tool for the examination of the assumed illness of the artist, results in a distorted image. Mark Twain's own words, and those of his family, indicate that his marriage, family life, and his large circle of friends brought him joy. Despite the suggestion of tensions in his

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[41]Wecter, Sam Clemens of Hannibal, p. 64.

[42]Ibid. A review by Henry Nash Smith, "Boyhood of Mark Twain," Nation, September 27, 1952, p. 274, states: "We are not likely to find out more about Sam Clemens' first seventeen years than is set forth in the present volume."

marriage made by certain critics, the comments of many others, and Twain's correspondence, reveal that his was an unusually happy marriage based on mutual love and admiration. After thirteen years of marriage he wrote his wife:

> The longer I know you, the more and more I esteem and admire and honor you for your rare wisdom, your peculiar good sense, your fortitude, endurance, pertinacity. Your justice, your charity, kindliness, generosity, magnanimity, your genuine righteousness and your unapproachable excellence in the sublime and gracious offices of motherhood. Many wives call out our love--that is common--but very few such honor and admiration.43

Mark Twain, unlike less well-adjusted artists, was always a gregarious soul; he loved good company at all hours. The Clemens' homes, both here and abroad, were centers of social well-being and good entertainment. Their many friends liked to have them as guests. William Dean Howells wrote after a felicific evening:

> Your visit was a perfect ovation for us; we never enjoy anything so much as those visits of yours. The smoke and the Scotch and the late hours almost kill us; but we look each other in the eyes when you are gone, and say what a glorious time it was, and air the library, and begin sleeping and dieting, and longing to have you back again.44

Those critics who attach symbolic significance to Olivia's calling her husband "Youth" may have forgotten that his

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[43] As quoted by Clara Clemens, My Father, Mark Twain (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1931), p. 40.

[44] Clemens, Mark Twain-Howells Letters, eds. Smith and Gibson, I, 165.

extraordinary vigor, his youthful appearance, and his boyish enthusiasm for life made the familiar name appropriate. Paul Fatout, in reconstructing the story of Twain's ambitious lecture tours, remarked that "the man seemed indestructible, his vitality exhaustless."[45] And Clara recalled: "He was fundamentally young to the day of his death . . . ."[46]

Although a few critics have written provocative commentaries on Twain's "guilt complex," or suggested that working powerfully in Mark Twain was "the twain," the split man (both Van Wyck Brooks and T.S. Eliot had called him schizophrenic), the consensus today seems to be that Twain was "an eminently normal man."[47] The trouble with these strictly psychological interpretations is that "too few critics of his own kind have written about Mark Twain. What he suffers from in the midst of this twentieth and American century is a lack of peers."[48]

Mark Twain was a man of the world--a world of "primitive accumulation," as Kenneth Rexroth describes it, adding: "It was the official culture which was schizophrenic,

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[45]Fatout, p. 285.

[46]Clemens, *My Father, Mark Twain*, p. 258.

[47]Kenneth Rexroth, "Humor in a Tough Age," *Nation*, March 7, 1959, p. 213.

[48]*Ibid.*, p. 211.

not Mark Twain."[49] In spite of his cosmopolitanism, however, Twain's small-town mores clung to him throughout his life. When he caught himself in some oversight or vain, ignoble deed, his conscience gave him no peace. Though he delighted in the panoply of royalty and high social position, he believed passionately in individual freedom of enterprise for all men. He was too spendthrift and generous-hearted to manage money while he earned great wealth and world-wide acclaim. In short, he has been called an American prototype. Critics who have decried Mark Twain's changeable nature have often exhibited similar characteristics themselves. For example, Leslie Fiedler at one time remarked that Huck and Nigger Jim, along with such classic literary pairs as Natty Bumpo and Chingachgook, and Ishmael and Queequeg, represent a kind of "mythic" homosexual love,[50] and at another time said:

> To make of Twain either a cult or a case, is finally to lose the sense of him as a poet, the possessor of deep and special mythopoeic power, whose childhood was contemporaneous with a nation's; and who, remembering himself before the fall of puberty, remembered his country before the fall of the Civil War. The myth which Twain creates is a myth of childhood, rural, sexless, yet blessed in its natural Eden by the promise of innocent love, and troubled by the shadow of bloody death.[51]

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[49] Ibid., p. 212.

[50] Fiedler, "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!" p. 666.

[51] Fiedler, "Duplicitous Mark Twain," p. 242.

Any discussion of Mark Twain's dynamic personality leads naturally to a consideration of his criticism of the society in which he lived. His comments on the foibles of mankind, which sometimes startled his colleagues, revealed a very real compassion for humanity. His sensitive nature and the conflicts in his own behavior were closely related to his feelings about man's progress on earth. Because he was a humanitarian, Mark Twain feared for man's future and wrote frankly of man's faults.

CHAPTER FIVE

SOCIAL CRITIC

> Peace by persuasion has a pleasant sound, but I think we should not be able to work it. We should have to tame the human race first, and history seems to show that that cannot be done. Can't we reduce the armaments little by little--on a pro rata basis--by concert of the powers? Can't we get four great powers to agree to reduce their strength 10 per cent a year and thrash the others into doing likewise? [1]

Mark Twain wrote this plea over fifty years ago, but it is just as timely and even more urgent today, when the Atomic Age seems to portend the loss of man's freedom, if not his destruction. Perhaps it is the urgency of the present world situation which makes new explorations of Twain's deterministic philosophy especially appropriate and his commentary on social problems valuable beyond any earlier estimate. "Many of the comments on public affairs he made during his later years are penetrating enough to give us the uncomfortable feeling that, if we had listened to him, we might have escaped some of the worst things that have happened to us since he went away."[2] Philip Foner writes that his study of Twain as a social critic takes "a careful look at what

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[1] Samuel Langhorne Clemens, Mark Twain's Letters, ed. A.B. Paine (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1917), II, 672.

[2] Edward Wagenknecht, "Remarked by Twain," New York Times Magazine, May 17, 1959, Sec. 6, p. 88.

Mark Twain had to say that makes him a powerful influence for freedom and democracy among peoples everywhere."[3] Foner's intensive study of this subject led him to conclude that

> Mark Twain was our greatest social critic. As such he speaks to us with an immediacy that surmounts the barriers of time.[4]

For many years Mark Twain's later works were regarded lightly, or casually dismissed as unimportant. But William Dean Howells, although he was not sure that Twain's comments on "grave and weightier" matters were more important than the lighter things, did speculate that they would be of interest to newer readers, while older readers would "tolerably allow a humorist sometimes to be a philosopher."[5] Howells' prediction has been effected; the study of Mark Twain as a deterministic philosopher and social commentator has gained new importance in the past decade. Henry Nash Smith, present editor of the Mark Twain Estate, emphasizes this viewpoint:

> . . . I can think of no other man whose work so clearly needs to be placed in a social setting before it can be fully understood. No other American writer of comparable importance is so unmistakably of the people. . . . His work is an almost uninterrupted commentary on matters

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[3]Foner, _Mark Twain: Social Critic_ (New York: International Publishers Company, Inc., 1958), p. 7.

[4]_Ibid._, p. 313.

[5]Howells, _My Mark Twain: Reminiscences and Criticisms_ (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1910), p. 184.

uppermost in the minds of his readers and hearers . . . .[6]

Recognizing Mark Twain's importance as a critic of society, writers have been wrestling with the so-called "Mark Twain Problem" for two generations.

> The development of Mark Twain from a good-humored entertainer into a deterministic pessimist is one of the major problems in the study of American literature. For the critics of the twenties, thirties, and forties, it was indeed a *cause célèbre*.[7]

The "change" in Twain's attitudes from his early broad-humored optimism to the more profound and satiric humor of his late work is well known. What remains the chief problem for today's critics to determine is the causality in Twain's cynical bitterness and despair. Critical comment now seems to concentrate on Mark Twain's sensitive personality, the external influences of the times in which he lived, his business affairs, his reading, his friends, and the personal tragedies which marred his happiness as factors contributing to his growing pessimism.

Present-day critics realize that the "change" in Twain's outlook was not sudden; it was the outcome, rather, of a life-long sensitivity to both the serious and the comic in situations. In his mature years he wrote:

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[6]Henry Nash Smith, "Can 'American Studies' Develop a Method?" *American Quarterly*, IX (Summer 1957), 197.

[7]Gerhard Friedrich, "Erosion of Values in Mark Twain's Humor," *The CEA Critic*, XXII (September 1960), 1.

> Every one is a moon, and has a dark side which he never shows to anybody. Pudd'nhead Wilson's New Calendar.[8]

The "dark side" of Twain's nature was developed in his childhood. Jane Clemens, according to Dixon Wecter, "had a measure of the Kentucky hill-woman's fascination with direful dreams and the catalogue of human woes . . . ."[9] Her son Samuel's acute imagination would make him vividly aware of such things. Moreover, at an early age he felt a secret animus toward his father, the stern John Clemens. Twain scholars cannot agree upon the extent to which such early influences led him toward pessimism. (Wecter and DeLancey Ferguson feel that black moods were a part of Twain's nature, and Wagenknecht says that they were not basic in his temperament but came on after the death of Susy.) Most critics think that personality factors played an important part in both his idealism and his cynicism.

His character traits developed during a long lifetime in the midst of rapid expansion and change in world culture.

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[8]Clemens, Following the Equator, The Writings of Mark Twain, VI, 350.

[9]Wecter, Sam Clemens of Hannibal (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1952), p. 126. Another aspect of his mother's influence on her son is mentioned by Kenneth Andrews, Nook Farm, Mark Twain's Hartford Circle (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1950), p. 67. "We know that his sensitive conscience was impressed by the lurid imagery of hell-fire that reaches a mythological incandescence in Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn."

"Simply to describe one's childhood in a pre-Civil War village of the Mississippi Valley was to chronicle the dawn of modern history," says Roger B. Salomon in his newly published study of Twain as a philosopher. In this book he emphasizes the relationship between Twain's ideas and the times.[10] He adds that

> Twain would write as an older man in "Book Two" of "Eddypus" (his attempt at a universal history) that he was living "in the noonday glory of the Great Civilization, a witness of its gracious and beautiful and all-daring youth, witness of its middle-time of giant power, sordid splendor and mean ambitions, and witness also of its declining vigor and the first stages of its hopeless retreat before the resistance forces which itself had created and which were to destroy it."[11]

Twain's interest in man's social and political history was lifelong. As a young man he had idealized his country as a land full of promise and opportunity. But his life spanned the Civil War, the Great Divide in America's history.

Mark Twain was twenty-six years of age when war broke out. He campaigned two weeks with the Missouri Confederate Rangers before joining his brother Orion, whose appointment as Secretary of Nevada Territory took them both west in the summer of 1861. A recently discovered letter to Billy Clagett,

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[10] Salomon, _Twain and the Image of History_ (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 8.

[11] _Ibid._ This previously unpublished comment by Twain is from the Mark Twain Papers, Berkeley: University of California Library.

a mining companion, written on September 9, 1862, just after the Union disaster at the second battle of Bull Run, shows Mark Twain's youthful concern:

> . . . it appears to me that the very existence of the United States is threatened just now. . . . Strategy will bust this nation yet, if they just keep it up long enough, my boy 12

Like many others, Twain was caught in a dilemma: he was sympathetic toward the independence of Negroes, yet he knew the importance of an institution upon which the economy of the South was based. He was torn between respect for the Constitution, which reserved certain rights to the States, and fear of the danger of national disintegration. This conflict of ideals had a sobering effect upon young Clemens:

> The Civil War is the watershed in Twain's life between innocence and experience, childhood and manhood, joy and pain; but it is politically, of course, the dividing line between slavery and freedom. And Twain, who cannot deny either aspect, endures the contradiction of searching for a lost happiness he knows was sustained by an institution he is forced to recognize is his country's greatest shame.13

This period of great conflict and profound change is reflected in Twain's works. In 1873 he and Charles Dudley Warner wrote:

> The eight years in America from 1860 to 1868

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[12] "Two Civil War Letters," American Heritage, October 1957, p. 62.

[13] Leslie Fiedler, "As Free As Any Cretur . . . ," New Republic, August 22, 1955, p. 16.

> uprooted institutions that were centuries old, changed the politics of a people, transformed the social life of half the country, and wrought so profoundly upon the entire national character that the influence cannot be measured short of two or three generations.[14]

It wrought upon the personal character, too, tipping the balance from idealism toward pessimism for those individuals who were at all concerned for man's destiny.

Mark Twain was always seriously concerned about man's progress and the preservation of personal freedom and dignity. As a young writer in California in the 1860's he was proud of earning such epithets as "The Moral Phenomenon" and "The Moralist of the Main." He freely acknowledged "that the purpose of his writings was to flay by laughter and ridicule human affectation and social evils."[15] The cub reporter was frequently aroused to attack racial intolerance, especially maltreatment of Orientals in California. He wrote angrily of an incident in which a white boy had stoned a Chinaman:

> . . . the boy found out that a Chinaman had no rights that any man was bound to respect; that he had no sorrows that any man was bound to pity; that neither his life nor his liberty was worth the purchase of a penny when a white man needed a scapegoat.[16]

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[14]Clemens and Warner, _The Gilded Age_, _The Writings of Mark Twain_, X, 200-201.

[15]Albert E. Stone, Jr., _The Innocent Eye_ (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 39.

[16]As quoted by Stone from "Disgraceful Persecution of a Boy," p. 41.

As he grew older Twain was even more exercised about mankind's insufferable treatment of minority groups. James M. Cox calls this a sense of "racial guilt" and adds, "Like Hawthorne and Melville before him, he had glimpsed a dark reality behind the American dream of innocence."[17] A recent revival of interest in _Pudd'nhead Wilson_, Twain's last American novel, is believed by several critics to stem from the current interest in the racial dilemma. Fiedler predicts that this book will be read more often, because "the scenes between the mother and her unregenerate son . . . have the cruelty and magnificence attained only by a great writer telling us a truth we cannot afford to forget."[18] In this sense Twain is seen by Cox as an influence on William Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren, and Ralph Ellison, who explore the same territory in the fates of Joe Christmas, Amantha Starr, and Ellison's invisible man.[19]

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[17] Cox, "_Pudd'nhead Wilson_: The End of Mark Twain's American Dream," _South Atlantic Quarterly_, LVIII (Summer 1959), 361.

[18] Leslie Fiedler, "As Free As Any Cretur . . . ," _New Republic_, August 15, 1955, p. 17. See "American Literature," _Contemporary Literary Scholarship_, ed. Lewis Leary (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1958), p. 185, in which Fiedler writes of "the moral and symbolic impressiveness of that imperfect but haunting book." See also F.R. Leavis, "Mark Twain's Neglected Classic: The Moral Astringency of _Pudd'nhead Wilson_," _Commentary_, XXI (February 1956), 128-136.

[19] Cox, _op. cit._, p. 363.

After the Civil War the country had entered a period of extravagant optimism, of Manifest Destiny, and scientific progress which Twain personified in his own Colonel Sellers of The Gilded Age, who shared his creator's dreams of get-rich-quick opportunities in the new era. Twain's fascination with mechanical gadgets led him to try some of the new inventions, and he also worked on over one hundred inventions of his own.[20] His fondest dream of success--promotion of the Paige typesetter--brought him financial ruin, although it was similar to machines widely used by printers just a short time later. Twain seems to have had his father's bad luck in financial matters; such disappointments as the Paige failure contributed to an unfavorable outlook in his late years. Although Twain sometimes voiced his doubts about the way progress was being used and abused, he never turned his back on scientific advancement *per se*, for "just as exciting to Mark Twain as the technology of his century was the

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[20]For a pictorial report of the author's inventions and business ventures see Milton Meltzer, *Mark Twain Himself: A Pictorial Biography* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1960), pp. 190-210. Twain's Hartford home was said to have been the first private residence to have a telephone (although he had misjudged Bell's invention and turned down an opportunity to invest in it); he installed a telharmonium in his living room; and he was the first literary man to use a typewriter. In the midst of an unbelievably busy life of writing, lecturing, traveling, and publishing, he worked on such devices as a steam generator, a mechanical organ, a cash register, a gummed-page scrapbook, an invalid's food called "plasmon," and many other inventions.

American spirit of enterprise and aggressiveness that sparked progress."[21]

Twain's love of invention is reflected in the Yankee's ingenuity in A Connecticut Yankee, written in 1889. Many critics believe that this work represents the line of demarcation between the "early" and the "late" Twain; it demonstrates a harmony between the writer's early optimism and later pessimism because it can be read on two levels--either as a light burlesque, or as a devastating satire. Cox suggests that Twain's motives for writing the story were two-fold: that he was exasperated by Matthew Arnold's criticisms of American culture, and the Yankee's attitudes were his response; and that Twain was obsessed with inventions at the time (that year he was spending three thousand dollars a month on promotion of the Paige typesetter), and identified himself with Hank Morgan.[22] Canby takes to task those critics who think this novel is a parody of Malory's "Morte d'Arthur," or a satire on Tennyson's Arthur. "It is a burlesque," he

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[21]Sherwood Cummings, "Mark Twain and the Sirens of Progress," Journal of the CMVASA, I (Fall 1960), 19.

[22]James M. Cox, "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court: The Machinery of Self-Preservation," Yale Review, L (September 1960), 97. Cox believes this work is representative of the close tie between Twain's business interests and his writing, and that "the novel remains an act of personal salvation," for "in bringing Morgan to death Twain was symbolically killing the machine madness which possessed him."

writes, "which dirties the idea of chivalry." Canby censures the critics who call this work a bitter satire, because "Mark himself was really a humanitarian, not a reformer, and most of all a novelist."[23]

Beginning with the Yankee Hank Morgan in A Connecticut Yankee, Twain developed a central character in his late novels who was a detached observer. This figure is seen as another Yankee in Pudd'nhead Wilson, the stranger in "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg," Philip Traum, Satan's nephew in The Mysterious Stranger, and the Old Man in What Is Man? Robert Spiller notes, ". . . a totally cynical commentator on human nature moved into the center of Mark Twain's imagination."[24] The philosophy of this character expresses the theories of Darwin and determinism; man is a product of organic evolution; he is without free will or personal responsibility. All these "strangers" gain pleasure or revenge on humanity through the medium of the practical joke, and each of these late Twain books moves from creation to destruction.[25]

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[23]Henry Seidel Canby, "Hero of the Great Know-How," Saturday Review of Literature, October 20, 1951, pp. 7, 40.

[24]Spiller, The Cycle of American Literature (New York: The New American Library, 1957), p. 127.

[25]Cox, "A Connecticut Yankee . . . ," p. 102.

New attention has been given in recent years to Mark Twain's reading habits as an influence in his formulation of a deterministic philosophy. In addition to such old favorites as Suetonius and Carlyle, and Cervantes and Shakespeare, he was familiar with Hobbes, Hume, Darwin, Huxley, Lecky, Paine, and a host of other historians, biographers, and literary men.[26] Twain's avid reading and the stimulation of discussion with his Hartford circle of friends helped to shape his beliefs. His Hartford neighbors were a congenial group of intellectuals definitely in the forefront of the American literary scene. Most of them had had a more or less puritanical upbringing, and as adults they were familiar with the great philosophies and interested in the new beliefs. For Twain it had not been difficult to step from the Calvinist predestination of his Presbyterian Sunday school days to the determinism of his later years. "Mark Twain was at home in this neighborhood. He accepted the ethical ideals of Nook Farm and shared its spiritual uneasiness."[27] Darwinian theory, and the writings of Schopenhauer, Von Hartmann, Fitzgerald, Nordau, and Nietszche strongly affected many concerned individuals, who shared pessimistic feelings of a

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[26]See Salomon, p. 20, for a list of Twain's reading.

[27]Kenneth Andrews, chap. 2, "Varieties of Religious Experience," Nook Farm, has a detailed study of the part religious thought played in Twain's philosophical development, p. 76.

fin de siècle spirit.[28]

From 1890 on, under the impact of personal tragedy,[29] Twain reshaped his theories gradually in accord with the scientific and economic trends of his age. The essay _What Is Man?_ is an "astringent diagnosis of man as a mechanism, the plaything of chance . . . ."[30] Twain himself called this essay "one chapter of my gospel," and defended his talk on it at the Monday Evening Club of Hartford:

> They said I was trying to strip man of his dignity, and I said I shouldn't succeed, for it would not be possible to strip him of a quality he did not possess.[31]

Alexander Jones has explored the sources of Twain's philosophy of determinism, shown why Twain's "gospel" so obviously satisfied him, and how he employed it in _What Is Man?_[32] It

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[28]See Howard Mumford Jones, _Guide to American Literature and Its Backgrounds Since 1890_, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 124. He mentions specific examples of pessimism in the literature of the 1890's: George Santayana's _Lucifer_ and Twain's _The Mysterious Stranger_.

[29]Most critics call attention to these major crises in Twain's late years: failure of the Paige typesetter; the Webster Publishing Company bankruptcy, and the resulting loss of the author's personal fortune; the discovery that Jean was epileptic; his favorite daughter Susy's sudden death of meningitis; and his wife's decline into invalidism and her death.

[30]Lewis Leary, _Mark Twain_ (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1960), p. 40.

[31]Clemens, _Mark Twain in Eruption_, ed. Bernard DeVoto (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1940), p. 240.

[32]Jones, "Mark Twain and the Determinism of 'What Is Man?'" _American Literature_, XXIX (March 1957), 1-17.

is Jones's contention that this work reflects the ideas and beliefs held by Twain during his most prosperous years, and is not just the result of bankruptcy and bereavement, as many critics have believed. Moreover, "as a formal presentation of a theory which matured slowly in his mind, the work weaves the strands of his religious and philosophical speculation into a comparatively unified fabric."[33] The determinism of _What Is Man?_ was not formulated just to assuage Twain's overburdened conscience, as earlier critics had felt, but was, according to Jones, "an attempt to whittle mankind down to proper size, or at least to go on record as opposing pride."[34]

Twain's doctrine of man as a machine, whose life is determined by environment, who is selfishly motivated, and incapable of an original thought, has long been thought to have resulted from the despair of a man who had lost all faith in mankind. But contemporary critics like Jones emphasize that Twain's determinism _can_ serve as a doctrine of hope; Mark Twain always stressed the fact that humans were capable of improvement. Although his careful study of astronomy and Freemasonry[35] had shown him man's relative insignificance, he repeatedly emphasized his conviction that

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[33] _Ibid._, p. 3.

[34] _Ibid._, p. 13.

[35] See Jones, "Mark Twain and Freemasonry," _American Literature_, XXVI (November 1954), 363-373.

> training--training is everything; training is all there is to a person. We speak of nature; it is folly; there is no such thing as nature; what we call by that misleading name is merely heredity and training.[36]

"Training is everything. The peach was once a bitter almond; cauliflower is nothing but cabbage with a college education."[37] Sherwood Cummings has said that "Mark Twain recognized the formative influence of environment on character when he was a writer in his prime as clearly as when he was the aging philosopher."[38] This can be seen in the famous scene of Huck's struggle with his conscience over his "white lie":

> . . . I see it warn't no use for me to try to learn to do right; a body that don't get started right when he's little ain't got no show--when the pinch comes there ain't nothing to back him up and keep him to his work, and so he gets beat.[39]

In training lay hope, thought Twain. Rather than give up in despair, he continued to expose man's socially undesirable actions as products of faulty training. He hoped that by making fun of man's posturings and by getting down to the

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[36]Clemens, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, The Writings of Mark Twain, XVI, 143-144.

[37]Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar, Pudd'nhead Wilson, The Writings of Mark Twain, XIV, 49.

[38]Cummings, "Science and Mark Twain's Theory of Fiction," Philological Quarterly, XXXVII (January 1958), 31.

[39]The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, The Writings of Mark Twain, XIII, 129-130.

essential nature of man, he could remind man of his possibilities for "betterment."

Mark Twain's comments upon man's social behavior were the basis for the short story, "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg," in which (long before Sinclair Lewis) he pierced the shell of small-town respectability and of man's gullibility. Lewis Leary calls this story "Clemens's most trenchant testimony to the fundamental dishonesty of man," and adds that "no more astringent or cynical condemnation of contemporary mores has been issued by an American . . . ."[40] This bitter comedy of the town that changed its motto from "Lead Us Not Into Temptation" to "Lead Us Into Temptation" is an incisive comment about the relentless, insidious way in which money undermines character. As in other late works, Twain used the device of the practical joke played by the mysterious stranger upon the pious village folk and the comic surprise ending to emphasize his cynical, bitter theme.

Sometimes the cynical remarks Twain made about mankind (reflecting the disillusionment of a realist who had been cheated of his idealistic dreams) have been taken too literally by some readers. Many of his irreverent and caustic sayings about God and the Bible and his fellow man are considered by contemporary critics to reveal the cold eye of the

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[40]Leary, Mark Twain, p. 40.

realist who was keenly aware of man's shortcomings. Far from disowning humanity, Mark Twain worked for its improvement. He had discovered his method early in his writing career: a writer "can deliver a satire with telling force through the insidious medium of travesty . . . ."[41] In addition to using the weapon of satire, Twain liked to turn the tables on the usual ideas people held; for example, Huck Finn may be a "bad" boy by Horatio Alger standards, but he is "good," naturally good, in his thoughts and actions. And while Huck and Jim's actions may seem reprehensible in the eyes of other characters in the book, they are actually admirable. Use of this paradoxical treatment allowed Twain to present the doctrine of meliorism taught by his Nook Farm neighbor, Bushnell, by subtle means. The fact that Twain often used such paradoxes, as well as satire and burlesque, has been carefully considered by modern scholars in evaluating Twain's comments about the "damned human race."[42]

When Mark Twain completed his lecture trip around the world in 1896, he was a man of sixty with a lifetime of travel

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[41]As quoted by Caroline Harnsberger, Mark Twain at Your Fingertips (New York: Beechhurst Press, Inc., 1948), p. 424. The comment originally appeared in Twain's article, "A Couple of Sad Experiences," Galaxy Magazine, June 1870.

[42]See Franklin R. Rogers, Mark Twain's Burlesque Patterns (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1960); and Edward J. Gordon, "What's Happened to Humor?" English Journal, XLVII (March 1958), 127-133.

and experience behind him. His observation of some of the excesses of late nineteenth-century imperialism did not augment his faith in human progress. Closely related to the deterministic philosophy he expressed in The Mysterious Stranger is this description of his impression of India:

> . . . it is history; it is that that affects you, a haunting sense of the myriads of human lives that have blossomed, and withered, and perished here, repeating and repeating and repeating, century after century, and age after age, the barren and meaningless process; it is this sense that gives to this forlorn, uncomely land power to speak to the spirit and make friends with it; to speak to it with a voice bitter with satire, and eloquent with melancholy.[41]

In The Mysterious Stranger, Satan, "a supernatural visitant with a ruthless wisdom, a strange innocence, and a detachment which are beyond mortal compass,"[42] asks his young companions if they would "like to see a history of the progress of the human race," whereupon he presents a vision of "a long series of unknown wars, murders, and massacres," and "hideous drenchings of the earth with blood," and a view in which "Christianity and Civilization march hand in hand through the ages, 'leaving famine and death and desolation in their wake, and other signs of the progress of the human race,' as

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[41]Clemens, Following the Equator, The Writings of Mark Twain, VI, 153.

[42]Coleman O. Parsons, "The Background of The Mysterious Stranger," American Literature, XXXII (March 1960), 61.

Satan observed."[43] A recent critical opinion takes issue with the idea that Twain's philosophy in this late masterpiece sanctions solipsism. Roger Salomon believes that "in his desire to escape the shock and disillusionment of life in time, Twain had arrived close to the modern existentialist position." According to Salomon:

> The real theme of The Mysterious Stranger--the theme which, as it is developed concretely, gives to the book its enduring value--is not the literal unreality but the meaninglessness of life. Life is insubstantial only in its futility, its lack of stable and enduring values; only in the face of the indifference (if not the malice) of God, the weakness and the limited vision of man, the sense of the monotony and repetition of human events.[44]

As a statement of Twain's philosophy, as well as of his criticism of humanity, The Mysterious Stranger has been of particular interest to critics of the past decade. At least two discussions of the book attack the philosophy it presents as superficial or immature, and point out the conflict it reveals between Twain's philosophical ideas and his reactions to experience. "It is the perennial conflict between 'thought' and 'emotion,' the perpetual agony of the faulty hypothesis: failure satisfactorily to arbitrate the claims of objective and subjective phenomena ultimately

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[43] The Mysterious Stranger, The Portable Mark Twain, ed. Bernard DeVoto (New York: The Viking Press, 1946), pp. 717-718.

[44] Salomon, pp. 206-207.

explains the basic confusion in The Mysterious Stranger."[45] The most complete study of the shaping influences behind the story has been made by Coleman Parsons, who calls this work "a pedagogical-philosophical romance" that expresses

> the despair of man's spirit in its growing awareness of life's sadness and inscrutability. Determinism and solipsism are autobiographical-experiential projections on a narrative canvas, human and emotional to their very roots, not intellectual.46

However, the moving way in which Mark Twain mourns the loss of the old dream of innocence in several scenes in the story, Albert Stone writes, "argues eloquently, though surreptitiously, that cynicism and solipsism are not really Twain's most deeply felt convictions." He finds that

> Twain's achievement--of sustaining until the final page a desperately delicate balance between despising mankind and loving certain individuals, between intellectual assertion of a meaningless universe and intuitive awareness of love's reality--makes The Mysterious Stranger a work of very modern dimensions. Characteristically, Twain was able to bring off this feat by viewing once again the bitter truths of

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[45]Edwin S. Fussell, "The Structural Problem of The Mysterious Stranger," Studies in Philology, XLIX (January 1952), 99. Fussell says that Twain "toyed with ideas of solipsism, the last refuge of the romantic subjectivist," in writing this book, 96.

[46]Parsons, "The Background of The Mysterious Stranger," 74. This essay traces the romantic solipsism of the book to Twain's reading of Carlyle, William James, Emerson, Pascal, Schopenhauer, Pater, Shakespeare, and others. Pages 55-74 discuss a wide range of influences Parsons sees in the work, including Twain's assimilation of ideas from Lecky, Swift, Voltaire, Milton, and the Apocryphal New Testament.

> human life from the double perspective of boyhood and old age. Looking through the innocent eye as well as through the tired mind enabled him, in a nostalgic sense at least, to keep writing worthwhile fiction right to the end of his unhappy life.47

The critic whose interest is in the philosophical ideas expressed in this fascinating story seems to have overlooked Twain's richly humorous comments and incidents which make the tale especially appealing. If this is the purely cynical, bitter work of a man who believes humanity to be "despicable" or "depraved" as some have said, how is the reader to account for Twain's frequent use of delightfully humorous situations and dialogue? And no reader forgets his moving and sincere plea for a sense of humor as mankind's saving grace:

> For your race, in its poverty, has unquestionably one really effective weapon--laughter. Power, money, persuasion, supplication, persecution--these can lift at a colossal humbug--push it a little--weaken it a little, century by century, but only laughter can blow it to rags and atoms at a blast. Against the assault of laughter nothing can stand.48

The "colossal humbug" Satan refers to came to be one of Mark Twain's major concerns in his late years. It is the "humbug" of man deceiving himself about his own greed, hypocrisy, and egotism which Twain always attacked.

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[47]Stone, pp. 248-250.

[48]Clemens, The Mysterious Stranger, The Portable Mark Twain, pp. 736-737.

Writing of what he calls Twain's "masterpieces of social criticism," "The United States of Lyncherdom," "To the Person Sitting in Darkness," and "The War Prayer," Philip Foner has said:

> Twain never gave up exposing the evils he saw in American society, but neither did he cease to assert his conviction that America was the best society the world had yet known. . . . These masterpieces of social criticism were written at a time when we have been led to believe that the dominant strain in Mark Twain was one of cynicism and pessimism, and when he had lost all hope and sympathy for the human race. To say only this is to pen a senseless libel on a great man.[49]

Much of what Twain wrote about politics, labor, business, and government was blunt and frank; he was always in favor of the "underdog." In a speech entitled "The New Dynasty," read before the Monday Evening Club in 1886, Twain took up the cudgels in favor of the Knights of Labor:

> Who are the oppressors? The few; the king, the capitalists, and a handful of other overseers and superintendents. Who are the oppressed? The many: the nations of the earth; the valuable personages; the workers; they that MAKE the bread that the soft-handed and the idle eat.[50]

Passages such as this from Twain's works are, of course, made-to-order for Russian propaganda. Paul Carter points out, however, that Twain's "New Dynasty" speech was a plea

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[49]Foner, pp. 311-312.

[50]Quoted in Paul Carter, Jr., "Mark Twain and the American Labor Movement," The New England Quarterly, XXX (September 1957), 384.

for "fair play, fair working hours, fair wages," and that Twain argued against the Socialist, the Communist, the Anarchist, the tramp and the selfish agitator, and also against all forms of political disease, pollution, and death.[51] Other scholars have assembled specialized studies which emphasize that Twain's criticism was often well-founded and that he was always a defender of democratic institutions and traditions against the attacks of foreign critics.

> No provincial, Twain delighted in travel in Europe, where he lived for about ten years, but he had no doubt about the superiority of the American system, though he frequently satirized its shortcomings, and had a clear realization of the vast difference between the ideal and the reality.[52]

In the Soviet Union today Mark Twain is hailed as a

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[51] *Ibid.*, 387-388.

[52] Daniel M. McKeithan, *Court Trials in Mark Twain and Other Essays* (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1958), p. x. For other aspects of Twain's social criticism see Clemens, *Mark Twain and the Government*, ed. Svend Petersen (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1960); J.C. McCloskey, "Mark Twain as Critic in *The Innocents Abroad*," *American Literature*, XXV (May 1953), 139-151; and Arthur L. Scott, "Mark Twain Looks at Europe," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, LII (July 1953), 399-413. Scott, 412-413, summarizes Twain's position in the perennial debate of Europe versus America: ". . . he was an effective mediator between the two worlds. He did not import European culture into the U. S. Instead, speaking always in the American idiom, he buttressed international amity by representing national culture in universal terms. Both in his life and in his letters he revealed the indivisibility of the human race. As other writers had drawn America closer to Europe, Mark Twain drew Europe closer to America."

"people's realist," and the works which are read enthusiastically are those with the most satirical criticism.[53] How Russian editors misconstrue and "slant" Twain's words is shown in several recent articles.[54] A Russian review of Neider's edition of the Autobiography led to a controversial exchange over his choice of material.[55]

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[53]Joseph Wood Krutch, "Now the Kremlin Claims Mark Twain," New York Times Magazine, March 6, 1960, Sec. 6, part 1, p. 16. He writes, "Mark Twain is one of the most popular writers in the Soviet Union, where a twelve-volume edition of his works was begun in 1958 with a first printing of 300,000 copies."

[54]See Henry Nash Smith, "A Soviet View of Six Great Americans," American Heritage, October 1960, pp. 64-67. Smith comments, pp. 69-70, that the entry for Mapk Tbeh (Mark Twain) in the Bol'shaya Sovetskaya Entzikiopediya is a typical attack on the middle class, and an attempt to show that all Twain's works depict class struggle. The Russian statement "in his fiction Twain endows the masses with kindness and nobility," Smith calls a "flat assertion" which "is belied by all the major works mentioned." See also "Mauling Our Mighty," Newsweek, September 19, 1960, p. 56; and a rebuttal of a misconstrued use of Twain quotations in the Soviet Literary Gazette by Ivan D. London, "No Comment Necessary!" American Psychologist, VII (June 1952), 192-194.

[55]See Charles Neider, Mark Twain and the Russians: An Exchange of Views, trans. Robert L. Belknap (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960). This is a reprint of a controversial exchange between Neider, collector and critic of Twain's works, and Yan Bereznitsky, editor of the official Soviet Literary Gazette (Literaturnaya Gazeta). Reviewing Neider's The Autobiography of Mark Twain in the August 18, 1959, issue of the Gazeta, Bereznitsky accused Neider of leaving out Twain's more satirical social comments in favor of his milder pieces on baldness, phrenology, honorary degrees, and so forth. "He must have decided to shut Twain's trap," the editor wrote, and added, "these few, inoffensive trifles are called

Undoubtedly, the current interest in Twain's social criticism stems from the fact that so much of what he had to say over half a century ago has come to pass; Twain's modern viewpoint, and the amazing accuracy of some of his predictions make his work timely. His comments on man's increasing ability to perfect techniques for killing himself seem almost apocalyptic:

> . . . a few centuries from now he will have so greatly improved the deadly effectiveness of his weapons of slaughter that all men will confess that without Christian civilization war must have remained a poor and trifling thing to the end of time.[56]

And especially timely is his warning in A Connecticut Yankee that scientific warfare may backfire and destroy conqueror and conquered alike. Twain even "invokes the nightmare of

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upon to replace the brilliant, angry pages of the original, unprocessed Twain, which are many times superior to them in scope and significance." (p. 15) Neider replied (appealing to Khrushchev to get his reply printed in the Gazeta), mentioning the "fresh outburst of interest in Twain" and defending his own selection on the grounds of popular appeal: "For me Mark Twain is essentially a great fabulist and not a great maker of political utterances. The reason I omitted his attacks on the politicians was that I found them dull and dated." (p. 17) For critical comment on this Neider-Russian controversy see Dwight Macdonald, "Mark Twain: An Unsentimental Journey," The New Yorker, April 9, 1960, pp. 164-165. He writes: "For once, I think the comrades have had the better of a literary argument. Twain's attacks on the oligarchy were much less dated, dull, and trivial than a good deal of what Mr. Neider has included, and autobiography that leaves out Twain's indignation at what was happening to America in the last two decades of his life does not give a true picture."

[56]The Mysterious Stranger, The Portable Mark Twain, p. 719.

the mushroom cloud"[57] in a frighteningly realistic fantasy, "Sold to Satan," in which he writes that Satan could release enough atomic energy from his body so that "the world would vanish away in a flash of flame and a puff of smoke, and the remnants of the extinguished moon would sift down through space a mere snow-shower of gray ashes."[58] A more thought-provoking, stimulating critic of mankind could hardly be found for this mid-twentieth century.

In analyzing the "Mark Twain Problem" and speculating about the causes for Twain's pessimism, some critics have mistakenly judged him by his late works alone, thus discounting the important fact that he was the impresario of his own personality, ever-ready to meet the demands of commercial publishing needs, whether they were for children's books or political essays. There always remained in Twain's work the unmistakable presence of a sly, tongue-in-cheek humor behind his serious statements.[59] He never forgot his

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[57]Sherwood Cummings, "Mark Twain and the Sirens of Progress," p. 22.

[58]"Sold to Satan," Europe and Elsewhere (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1923), pp. 333-334.

[59]Lewis Leary has edited a volume of amusing letters Twain wrote to one of his "honorary nieces," Mary Benjamin Rogers, in the last lonesome years of his life, Mark Twain's Letters to Mary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961). Leary says, p. 3, "They are not sad letters. . . . Mark Twain could seldom be dull, even in his late despair. When his mood turned black or bitter, his words mocked it, so that even he must have smiled, as others smiled when he growled or grimaced . . . ."

own advice that a sense of humor is man's saving grace. Hal Holbrook writes:

> I am impatient with those critics who castigate Mark Twain for his pessimism as if it were some rare disease. It is a disease that infects us all. The thing to remember and admire is that Mark Twain left so much laughter behind.[60]

Philip Foner's thorough study of Twain as a social critic reveals his unshakable humanitarianism, and his great concern for man's freedom:

> Twain's frequent protestations of disgust with all mankind were belied by a shining compassion, an infinite capacity for love. This dominated everything he wrote, even The Mysterious Stranger, which is certainly the most pessimistic of his work. In spite of the gathering clouds of personal misery that shadowed his later years, in spite of all the things he found wrong with "the damned human race," he remained the sensitive, remarkable man who, far from believing in nothing, was profoundly committed to the struggle for human freedom, and who continued to use all his great talents, his phenomenal mastery of words, to advance that struggle.[61]

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[60] Mark Twain Tonight! (New York: Ives Washburn, Inc., 1959), p. 90.

[61] Foner, p. 312.

CHAPTER SIX

LITERARY ARTIST

Academic approval on a world-wide scale came too late for Mark Twain, who wanted so much to be accepted by the scholarly gentry of his day. Critics had considered him "a clever humorist but not quite a gentleman--culturally naïve and aesthetically malformed." However, "he holds today a secure place in the very best of literary company . . . ."[1] Critical enthusiasm for his work now ranks it with that of Hawthorne, Melville, and Henry James, in terms of the number of scholarly studies published. The new concern for intrinsic analysis of literature has made the intensive examination of fiction important to the contemporary critic. The artistic merit of Mark Twain's fiction has been the subject of serious critical attention in recent years. Thus the judgments of aesthetically oriented critics have helped the scholar and the general reader to recognize Twain's full stature as one of America's finest writers. What Mark Twain had to say about his fellow man is of major interest, but without his phenomenal mastery of words his ideas would

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[1]Henry A. Pochmann, "Introduction," _Journal of the Central Mississippi Valley American Studies Association_, I (Fall 1960), 1.

fail to attract readers in anything like the numbers who now read and reread his books. It is the sheer power and force with which he used the English language that makes Mark Twain a true literary artist, whose prose style is a rich contribution to the great body of world literature.

Writers have often hailed Twain as the founder of a school of realistic writing in the use of natural, colloquial prose. "One does not have to look far in modern fiction to identify the legacy of Mark Twain," comments Albert Stone.[2] Stone's list of writers includes, in chronological sequence, Booth Tarkington, O. Henry, Sherwood Anderson, Edgar Lee Masters, Ernest Hemingway, and William Faulkner. To this group, "all indebted to Twain and to the natural speech in which his stories are told," Stone adds a group of Southern writers "who find in the freshness and immediacy of the child's mind an appropriate alembic for their insights": Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, Truman Capote, Shirley Ann Grau, and Harper Lee. These writers, Stone feels, are challenged by "a rich complex of family, race, and history" and share the lesson of Twain's "ear for dialect, his eye for the physical landscape and the social setting, his moral preoccupation

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[2] Albert E. Stone, Jr., _The Innocent Eye: Childhood in Mark Twain's Imagination_ (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 277.

with the central issue of Southern life . . . ."[3] To this list of literary legatees of Twain, novelist Herman Wouk (Pulitzer Prize winner) and critic George Mayberry add the names of Jack London, Theodore Dreiser, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sinclair Lewis, H.L. Mencken, J.P. Marquand, Ring Lardner, John Dos Passos, and Erskine Caldwell, according to Walter Blair. "Whether major writers or not, such diverse authors as Ben Hecht, Henry Miller, and William Saroyan have personally testified that they have worked under Mark Twain's tutelage and benefited by it," Blair writes.[4] Several critics point out the influence of Huck's vernacular in such modern fiction as Saul Bellow's *Adventures of Augie March*, J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, and Robert Lewis Taylor's *The Travels of Jamie McPheeters*. The latter, a Pulitzer Prize winner written in 1958, has been followed by another Taylor river yarn in 1961, *A Journey to Matecumbe*, also reminiscent of *Huckleberry Finn*.

Many writers today, influenced by Mark Twain, find in the innocent child or young person a point of view which can powerfully express the wonder, humor, and tragedy of life. The similarities are most clearly seen, Stone believes, in

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[3] *Ibid.*

[4] Walter Blair, *Mark Twain and Huck Finn* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960), p. 7.

"the child's incomplete but harrowing perception of terror, so common a theme in all of Twain's stories."[5] The child's-eye view of the world, often that of an innocent discovering evil, is used by Faulkner in the short story "That Evening Sun" and in parts of The Sound and the Fury. An especially close relationship to Huck Finn is seen in Faulkner's Isaac McCaslin in "The Bear" from Go Down, Moses. Other young innocents are used by Carson McCullers in A Member of the Wedding, by Eudora Welty in Delta Wedding, by Ernest Hemingway in the Nick Adams stories, by Robert Lewis Taylor in The Travels of Jamie McPheeters and A Journey to Matecumbe, and by J.D. Salinger in The Catcher in the Rye.[6]

These beneficiaries of Twain's literary legacy have

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[5]Stone, p. 277.

[6]Several critics have commented on Salinger's use of a young boy as narrator and observer on a quest in the adult world, and of his "escape" because of alienation from a "sivilized" or "phoney" world, as Huck Finn and Holden Caulfield, respectively, call it. See Stone, The Innocent Eye, p. 278; Edgar Branch, "Mark Twain and J.D. Salinger: A Study in Literary Continuity," American Quarterly, IX (Summer 1957), 144-158, in which Branch writes, p. 145, "The creative imagination of these two authors who fuse given fact and boyish consciousness into expressive, dramatized narrative are strikingly similar. The Catcher in the Rye, in fact, is a kind of Huckleberry Finn in modern dress." See also Charles Kaplan, "Holden and Huck: The Odysseys of Youth," College English, XVIII (November 1956), 76-80. Kaplan writes, pp. 76-77, "Huck Finn and Holden Caulfield are true blood-brothers, speaking to us in terms that lift their wanderings from the level of the merely picaresque to that of a sensitive and insightful criticism of American life."

often publicly acknowledged their inheritance; Hemingway's famous claim that all American literature descends from Huckleberry Finn is frequently quoted in essays on the American tradition of realism in style. A less-familiar comment made by Faulkner during a recent tour of Japan shows his interest in genealogy. He told Japanese students at Nagano, "Mark Twain was the first truly American writer, and all of us are his heirs; we descended from him."[7] The modern literary trend toward realism--toward an accurate and detailed picture of life as it is rather than as it ought to be--stems from the influence of scientific thought upon late-nineteenth-century writers like Twain.

> The scientists' empirical approach to phenomena was reflected in the realistic writer's care to record accurately and in detail the speech and deeds of his characters and the setting in which those characters moved. The evolutionists' assertion that man was a creature of nature, shaped, like any organism, by the exigencies of environment, enjoined the realistic writer to portray his characters as products of their training and milieu.[8]

Twain's own comments on the writing of fiction, scattered unsystematically throughout his works,[9] emphasize

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[7]As quoted by James M. Cox, "Pudd'nhead Wilson: The End of Mark Twain's American Dream," South Atlantic Quarterly, LVIII (Summer 1959), 363.

[8]Sherwood Cummings, "Science and Mark Twain's Theory of Fiction," Philological Quarterly, XXXVII (January 1958), 26.

[9]Important Twain comments on the writer's technique have been assembled by Edgar H. Goold, Jr., "Mark Twain on

his insistence on close observation on the part of the writer: "Experience is an author's most valuable asset; experience is the thing that puts the muscle and the breath and the warm blood into the book he writes."[10] But the writer's observation must not be deliberate or studied. "Almost the whole capital of the novelist is the slow accumulation of unconscious observation--absorption."[11]

Until recently critics paid little attention to Mark Twain's style. With the publication of Lionel Trilling's Introduction to The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn came the first real estimate of Twain as a literary craftsman:

> Out of his knowledge of the actual speech of America Mark Twain forged a classic prose. The adjective may

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the Writing of Fiction," American Literature, XXVI (May 1954), 141-153. Goold points out that Twain was realistic in technique but often romantic in point of view. See also Robert J. Lowenherz, "Mark Twain on Usage," American Speech, XXXIII (February 1958), 70-72. He writes: "A product of the practical school of journalistic writing and public lecturing, Mark Twain had learned to use English as a flexible tool, not as a set of rules to be slavishly followed. In his criticisms of other authors, he is not concerned with grammatical solecisms or incorrect spelling or punctuation, but with vague or inaccurate diction, slovenly construction, logical absurdities, and other symptoms of shallow feeling and careless thinking." See another treatment of this subject by Sydney J. Krause, "Twain's Method and Theory of Composition," Modern Philology, LVI (February 1959), 167-177.

[10] Clemens, "Is Shakespeare Dead?" What Is Man? and Other Essays (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1917), p. 318.

[11] Clemens, "What Paul Bourget Thinks of Us," Literary Essays, The Writings of Mark Twain, XXII, 146.

> seem a strange one, yet it is apt. Forget the misspellings and the faults of grammar, and the prose will be seen to move with the greatest simplicity, directness, lucidity, and grace. These qualities are by no means accidental. Mark Twain, who read widely, was passionately interested in the problems of style; the mark of the strictest literary sensibility is everywhere to be found in the prose of *Huckleberry Finn*. . . . He is the master of the style that escapes the fixity of the printed page, that sounds in our ears with the immediacy of the heard voice, the very voice of unpretentious truth.[12]

Added to this accolade is the surprising homage paid to Twain's masterpiece from an unexpected quarter--the strictly formalist critic and poet, T.S. Eliot:

> Repeated readings of the book only confirm and deepen one's admiration of the consistency and perfect adaptation of the writing. This is a style which at the period, whether in America or England, was an innovation, a new discovery in the English language.[13]

These two critics were in the forefront of a group of scholars who began in the early fifties to write extensively on Twain's style. Gladys Bellamy and Edgar Branch were the first scholars to prepare book-length studies of Twain's stylistic achievements. Gladys Bellamy writes: "Mark Twain's artistic conscience is reflected in his intense care for the exact word and in his ability . . . to give an effect of perfect naturalness and unselfconsciousness--the

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[12]Lionel Trilling, "Introduction" to *The Adventures Huckleberry Finn* (New York: Rinehart & Company, 1948), pp. xvii-xviii.

[13]Eliot, "Introduction" to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (New York: Chanticleer Press, 1950), p. x.

art that seems no art . . . ."[14] Following the lead of these 1950 studies, critics have written a number of articles which analyze various aspects of Twain's literary style. Leo Marx, for example, believes that the language of Huck Finn is a vernacular used to depict Twain's native landscape --not in the stilted vocabulary of the literary cult of his day--but in a way that suggests "the lovely possibilities of life in America without neglecting its terrors."[15] Twain created a distinct prose style which was admirably adaptable, moving from a low vernacular to an ornate, elevated prose, or to the direct, unpretentious style of an impersonal reporter as the occasion demanded.

Critics were a long time in recognizing the artistry of Mark Twain's use of the vernacular. Reviewers of Huck Finn at the time of its publication had called it "vulgar, coarse, and inelegant" and had railed against its creator as a man who had violated the "genteel" tradition of literature. Critics today recognize that the language of Twain's masterpiece is closely related to spoken language, but that

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[14]Gladys Bellamy, Mark Twain as a Literary Artist (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), pp. 264-265. See also Edgar Branch, The Literary Apprenticeship of Mark Twain, with Selections from His Apprentice Writing (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1950).

[15]Marx, "The Pilot and the Passenger: Landscape Conventions and the Style of Huckleberry Finn," American Literature, XXVIII (May 1956), 143.

it has been consciously adapted to the purposes of a novel. Richard Chase says that the language of Huckleberry Finn is "a new literary style" and that it is

> literary because, unlike ordinary spoken language, it is always conscious of the traditional English--notably of the Bible and Shakespeare--from which it is departing. The language of Huckleberry Finn is a kind of joyous exorcism of traditional literary English, but this ritual act allies it irrevocably with what it exorcises.[16]

Twain knew that naturalness and spontaneity were essential to effective dialogue and praised other writers who possessed these traits. On one of the few occasions when he wrote a critical review of a fellow writer's work, he said of E.W. Howe's The Story of a Country Town:

> You write as a man talks; & very few can reach that height of excellence. I think a man who possesses that gift [several words marked out] is quite sure to write a readable book--& you have done that.[17]

Commenting on the difficulties of writing as a man talks, Twain said: "What is known as dialect writing looks simple and easy, but it is not . . . . A man not born to write dialect cannot learn to write it correctly. It is a gift."[18]

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[16]Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1957), p. 140.

[17]As quoted in C.E. Schorer, "Mark Twain's Criticism of The Story of a Country Town," American Literature, XXVII (March 1955), 110.

[18]As quoted by Lowenherz, "Mark Twain on Usage," 71.

The opportunity to test his story-telling ability on live audiences, beginning with his lectures about the Sandwich Islands in 1866, undoubtedly helped Mark Twain to improve his manner of writing dialect. His easy, conversational style owes a debt to the drama. Robert Wiggins has estimated that the proportion of dialogue in Twain's best books runs as high as eighty per cent, and that several distinct dialects are represented. Wiggins sees a theatrical influence in Twain's structural emphasis on scene (his settings often read like stage directions), his attention to costume and appearance, and his "visual-kinetic style of rendering the episodes."[19] Earlier critics who felt that Twain's art was artless--that is, accidental--overlooked the gradual improvement in his handling of dialect over the years. From such crude beginnings as his early yarn "Snodgrass, In a Adventure," notable for its use of cacography, Twain moved on to the free-flowing colloquial language of *Huck Finn* for which he is justly praised.

A penchant for symbol and myth-hunting among some contemporary critics has led to a new emphasis upon the symbolism in Twain's novels, a facet of the writer's work which has been neglected in the past. The mythopoeic

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[19]Wiggins, "Mark Twain and the Drama," *American Literature*, XXV (November 1953), 285-286.

qualities of Huckleberry Finn have been praised by T.S. Eliot and Lionel Trilling. Eliot's symbol of the river as a "strong brown god" is developed by Trilling, who quotes from the poet's meditation on the Mississippi, "The Dry Salvages," which begins: "I do not know much about gods; but I think that the river / Is a strong brown god . . . ." Trilling goes on to say that "Huck himself is the servant of the river-god, and he comes very close to being aware of the divine nature of the being he serves."[20] The mythic quality of Twain's masterpiece "is present in at least two forms--in the theme of initiation and in what may be called the ritual of exorcism."[21] Commenting upon the importance of exorcism and of supernatural folklore in Huck Finn, Daniel Hoffman writes that Jim's folklore superstitions early in the book dramatize his enslavement, but that later they symbolize the freedom of the pure spirit of "Natural Man"; ". . . they delineate him as a true priest of Nature, and contribute much to his emergence as co-hero of the book."[22]

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[20]Trilling, "Introduction" to Huckleberry Finn, pp. vii-viii.

[21]Chase, p. 144.

[22]Hoffman, "Jim's Magic: Black or White?" American Literature, XXXII (March 1960), 53-54. Twain's use of symbols is also discussed by J.A. Trainor, "Symbolism in A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court," Modern Language Notes, LXVI (June 1951), 382-385.

A Freudian interpretation of the symbolism in Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn has been advanced by James Cox. Cox wishes that scholars would take a greater interest in Tom's "repeated death fantasies" and sees "the central image of death" as one of major importance in both books. He calls Huck's strategy of his own mock murder in his Pap's cabin "probably the most vital and crucial incident of the entire novel," for Huck, thus "dead," is ready to be "reborn" on the river journey. It is Cox's contention that all of Huckleberry Finn revolves around the major theme of Huck's initiation into respectable society.[23] Another critic who accents the somber themes of death and rebirth in this novel is Kenneth Lynn, who believes Huck's symbolic initiations are "sine wave movements from birth to death and from freedom to slavery" which form the rhythm of the novel.[24]

When analyzing Mark Twain's techniques of writing, the modern scholar is often critical of his lack of a basic

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[23]Cox, "Remarks on the Sad Initiation of Huckleberry Finn," Sewanee Review, LXII (July 1954), 391,395.

[24]Lynn, "Huck and Jim," Yale Review, XLVII (March 1958), 427. See Lauriat Lane, Jr., "Why Huckleberry Finn Is a Great World Novel," College English, XVII (October 1955), 1-5. Lane (5) relates the basic symbolic pattern of the novel to other great literature employing symbolic journeys. "Dying symbolically almost at the opening of the novel, Huck journeys through the world of the spirit, ever working out a pattern of increasing involvement with the world of reality and with his own self, both cast aside at the beginning of the journey."

structure and of careless plotting in his work. "Almost everyone will recognize that 'Huck Finn' is not so well-made a novel as 'Tom Sawyer,' or even 'The Prince and the Pauper.' In 'Huck Finn' Mark Twain achieved the looseness of design to which his talents were best adapted."[25] Mark Twain was prepared for his critics, and the warning he fired at them in the "NOTICE" at the beginning of Huckleberry Finn attests to his genius as a wit:

> PERSONS attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.[26]

As is often the case, Twain here was indulging in understatement; this story has motive, moral, and plot. In re-creating a lost Golden Age of boyhood on the great river, Twain unified the novel by his emphasis on its themes of individual freedom, of a boy's steps toward maturity, and of the nature of good and evil. Certainly the most controversial discussions of Mark Twain's aesthetic achievements center around his most famous novel. "On the whole," Floyd

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[25] Lewis Leary, "Tom and Huck: Innocence on Trial," Virginia Quarterly Review, XXX (Summer 1954), 425. For other analyses of Twain's novel form see Barry A. Marks, "Mark Twain's Hymn of Praise," English Journal, XLVIII (November 1959), 443-448; and Louis D. Rubin, Jr., "Tom Sawyer and the Use of Novels," American Quarterly, IX (Summer 1957), 208-216.

[26] The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, The Writings of Mark Twain, XIII, iii.

Stovall summarizes, "the frame structure and the ending remain fascinating topics for debates."[27]

Walter Blair, who has made a thorough study of the forces which shaped Twain's thinking and writing during the ten years he worked on Huckleberry Finn, has shown that

> . . . contrasts and incongruities between Huck and Jim on the raft and the society on the shore . . . embody a theme of great personal significance to the author.
>
> A striking thing about several of the most persuasive recent interpreters of the novel is not that they disagree about numerous points--this is a habit of critics--but that they agree that the contrast . . . is vital to the book's meaning.[28]

The vexing questions of form and unity in this novel have been variously interpreted by the critics. Edgar Branch sees a thematic unity developed by the contrasts between the two conceptions of heavenly providence offered Huck by Miss Watson (a conventional, self-centered morality) and by the Widow Douglas (a humanitarian idealism). Thus the novel dramatizes the "conflict between individual freedom and the restraints imposed by convention and force," and Huck chooses the Widow's standard for conduct, which is based on giving unselfish aid to others.[29] Huck's conflict with the

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[27]Stovall, ed. Eight American Authors (New York: The Modern Language Association, 1956), p. 355.

[28]Blair, Mark Twain and Huck Finn, p. 344.

[29]Branch, "The Two Providences: Thematic Form in Huckleberry Finn," College English, XI (January 1950), 188.

religious elements in his society, Norris Yates believes, is the basis for a "counter-conversion" he undergoes.

> . . . Huck's absorbing of three major elements in frontier fundamentalism--its endorsement of slavery, its views on prayer, and its version of hell--have been applied in an ironically reverse fashion to bring about his counter-conversion into official reprobation and actual goodness. . . . By presenting part of Huck's moral growth within the pattern of a religious phenomenon that was widespread in rural America, and in a sense, by turning the pattern upside-down, Mark Twain supplied ingredients in the irony of the novel which deserve closer attention.[30]

One of the controversial issues debated in the literary journals in the past decade concerns the validity of the final chapters of *Huckleberry Finn*. The last fifth of

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[30]Yates, "The 'Counter-Conversion' of Huckleberry Finn," *American Literature*, XXXII (March 1960), 10. See also Gilbert M. Rubenstein, "The Moral Structure of *Huckleberry Finn*," *College English*, XVIII (November 1956), 70-76. These affirmations of the moral value of the book by Twain scholars are the antithesis of the view held by New York educators, who in 1957 barred the book from the approved textbook lists for the city's elementary and junior high schools, allegedly for its subversion of morality, and because it had been criticized as racially offensive by some Negroes. For reactions to this news see William Corbin McGraw, "Pollyanna Rides Again," *Saturday Review*, March 22, 1958, pp. 37-38, in which the author imagines a dialogue between Twain and the librarians entitled "If Sam Clemens Had Been Born Sixty Years Too Late." Hal Holbrook, *Mark Twain Tonight!* (New York: Ives Washburn, Inc., 1959), p. 93, comments on the banning: "This is a strange road to enlightenment. Is it too much to ask that the use of the word 'nigger' and the reasons for slavery be explained to the students? Use *Huck Finn* as the text; the book is nothing less than a hymn to brotherhood, as anyone--boy or man--can discover by reading it."

the book, beginning with Huck's arrival at the Phelps farm, has been alternately praised or at least defended on certain grounds, and severely criticized. The affirmative side of this perennial argument does not want for highly respected names among its members. The ending of Huck Finn has been found suitable by T.S. Eliot, Lionel Trilling, Walter Blair, and several others. It has been called disappointing by members of the negative side, including Leo Marx, William O'Connor, Leslie Fiedler, Dwight Macdonald, and others. T.S. Eliot has said: ". . . it is right that the mood at the end of the book should bring us back to that of the beginning."[31] Lionel Trilling admits that the end is too long and "is a falling-off, as almost anything would have to be, from the incidents of the river." But he adds that "it has a certain formal aptness," because "some device is needed to permit Huck to return to his anonymity, to give up the role of hero . . . ."[32]

In the most outspoken attack upon the ending of the novel and upon those who praise it, Leo Marx condemns the "current preoccupation with matters of form" which allows the critic to "shy away from painful answers to complex

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[31]Eliot, "Introduction" to The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, p. viii.

[32]Trilling, "Introduction" to The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, pp. xv-xvi.

questions of political morality," and says that today's "unqualified praise" of *Huckleberry Finn* represents a "serious weakness in current criticism." He specifically attacks Eliot and Trilling for what he considers their surprising narrowness of judgment:

> The eagerness of Mr. Eliot and Mr. Trilling to justify the ending is symptomatic of that absolutist impulse of our critics to find reasons, once a work has been admitted to the highest canon of literary reputability, for admiring every bit of it.[33]

Marx disagrees with Eliot's theory that the mood of the novel should rightly come full circle, saying that this means Huck's defeat, and that "to return to that mood *joyously* is to portray defeat in the guise of victory." The conclusion of the book, according to Marx, is a "major flaw" because it is a "flimsy contrivance" which stoops to farce, and its slapstick jars the serious undertones of the voyage and detracts from the meaning. Marx feels the end should offer a plausible outcome of the quest for freedom.[34]

On the other hand, Walter Blair defends the ending:

> It seems pretty clear what Twain had in mind: he would do for silly romances about prison escapes what Cervantes had done for silly romances in his day. More important, he would juxtapose with a serious narrative about a flight to achieve

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[33]Leo Marx, "Mr. Eliot, Mr. Trilling, and *Huckleberry Finn*," *American Scholar*, XXII (Autumn 1953), 434.

[34]*Ibid.*, 424-440.

> freedom, which develops certain themes, a burlesque narrative touching upon similar topics.35

Although some critics (Cox, Gullason, and Trilling) agree that the end serves as a frame for the heightened river sequence, others favor the theory that the conclusion was the result of Twain's difficulty with the structure of the novel. Edgar Branch says the end is

> an artificial maneuver to conclude the action; it is Mark Twain's payment for some earlier sins against the logic of plot. . . . It is a light play upon the earlier serious treatment, carrying us back by means of thematic echoes and transpositions of characters.36

Another critic suggests that the noble virtues of Huck embarrassed Twain, who felt obliged to return to Tom's juvenile romanticism in the plot to free Jim. Thus the author "retreated from his self-appointed role of social critic and through his characterization of Tom confessed his commitment to a social order from which (unlike Huck) he saw no possible escape."[37] Many critics have complained that

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[35]Blair, Mark Twain and Huck Finn, p. 349. See also T.A. Gullason, "The 'Fatal' Ending of Huckleberry Finn," American Literature, XXIX (March 1957), 87. "His primary objective in the 'fatal' last chapters is to ridicule, in the manner of Don Quixote, the romantic tradition as exemplified by Tom Sawyer, who lacks character, who is full of purposeless fun; and to win final sympathy for the realistic tradition and its hero, Huck, who has achieved a sense of responsibility and a meaningful vision of life."

[36]Branch, "The Two Providences . . . ," 193.

[37]Robert Ornstein, "The Ending of Huckleberry Finn," Modern Language Notes, LXXIV (December 1959), 702.

the conclusion is too farcical, but S.A. Nock repudiates this notion and says that it is good farce which brings the novel to a bright and cheerful finish. Nock feels that Twain, stuck with the impossibility of freeing Jim, made use of a deus ex machina, cleverly concealed, and that he wanted to remind the reader that Huck is a little boy. Thus to end the book with the same childhood games and pranks of the beginning suitably "brings Huck back to the ordinary world of ordinary people."[38]

Among the arguments concerning the artistic validity of the final sequence and related matters of the style of Huck Finn is a diatribe by William O'Connor, boldly titled--in the face of almost universal praise for Twain's great river book--"Why Huckleberry Finn Is Not the Great American Novel." This critique was conveniently paired with Lauriat Lane's article, "Why Huckleberry Finn Is a Great World Novel," in the same issue of College English. O'Connor

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[38]S.A. Nock, "The Essential Farce," Phylon Quarterly, XX (December 1959), 359-362. See Kaplan, "Holden and Huck . . . ," p. 78. Kaplan thinks the end is purposely tedious and irrelevant and is "both ironical and true to life" because it underlines Huck's repudiation of the shortcomings of the society which would trap him. James Cox, "Remarks on the Sad Initiation of Huckleberry Finn," p. 404, thinks that Tom's reappearance doesn't weaken the end. "Any comprehensive vision of the book will . . . consider Tom's presence at the end not only vital but inevitable. The flatness of the ending results from Tom's domination of the action and the style."

claims that the novel has been overvalued because readers think of Huck sentimentally as a symbol of innocence. He also complains that there is too much melodrama, that often the starkness of the horror scenes is unrelieved and too real, that Huck is not always consistent, and that one of the major flaws is that "the downstream movement of the story runs counter to Jim's effort to escape."[39] Lauriat Lane compares *Huck Finn* advantageously with other great world novels and epic poems and stresses that its themes are universal. He finds that the novel is like *Don Quixote* in its development of the theme of appearance versus reality.[40] Replies to these two controversial essays have been written by Gilbert Rubenstein, Walter Blair, and Robert Stallman. Rubenstein comments upon the "undeniable moral structure of the book" in his reply, adding that the story "should be approached simply, directly, *realistically*--precisely as Mark Twain wrote it." Lane is attacked for his allegorical and symbolistic extensions of the novel, and for his description of Huck (in which Lane echoes T.S. Eliot's ideas) as passive. Rubenstein says: "The very last word one should use to describe Huck is 'passive.'"

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[39]O'Connor, "Why *Huckleberry Finn* Is Not the Great American Novel," *College English*, XVII (October 1955), 6-10.

[40]Lane, "Why *Huckleberry Finn* Is a Great World Novel," *College English*, XVII (October 1955), 1-5.

To O'Connor's complaints of flaws in the work, Rubenstein spiritedly offers refutations, listing among its fine qualities Twain's "wonderfully accurate ear for colloquial speech, the naturalness with which the story begins and ends, the photographic eye for realistic physical detail, and the inclusion of national types."[41]

One of the alleged faults of the novel which has bothered O'Connor, Kenneth Lynn, and some others is the incongruity of a downstream trip by the raft in a quest for Jim's freedom, which takes the pair ever deeper into slave territory. In an historical appraisal of Twain's interest in the South and its problems, Louis J. Budd theorizes why Twain had Huck and Jim float past Cairo, Illinois:

> The simple explanation is that Jim's flight to freedom had to be misrouted so that Twain could work in many key episodes that are only incidental to the escape plot.[42]

Walter Blair, observing that this question had been considered earlier by DeVoto and Wecter, notes that the southward journey gives the narrative coherence and allows for a series of adventurous incidents which help the author say

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[41]Rubenstein, "The Moral Structure of Huckleberry Finn," 72-76.

[42]Budd, "The Southward Currents Under Huck Finn's Raft," The Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLVI (September 1959), 235.

what he has to say in the novel.[43] A more symbolic reason for the trip south is Robert Stallman's theory of a mythic rebirth by water. "The quest began with his drowning himself in order to find himself," Stallman says of Huck, adding that a land quest would represent a false rebirth.[44]

Disagreement among the critics over the aesthetic merit of the ending of Twain's greatest novel will no doubt continue, for this work of art enables each reader to discover what he will within its pages. A perceptive appraisal of this controversy has been made by Dwight Macdonald, who finds Huckleberry Finn "marred by its last hundred pages."

> But the point is precisely that the fake "adventures" initiated by Tom in the opening chapters yield to the real adventures of Huck and Jim, and a corresponding deepening of their characters. . . . to return to the mode of the opening is, in my opinion, to falsify and not to round out the artistic logic.[45]

No survey of analyses of Twain's technique by recent critics would be complete without some mention of his comic method and how it is currently regarded. Discussions of Twain's humor are not nearly so frequent in the literary

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[43]Blair, "Why Huck and Jim Went Downstream," College English, XVIII(November 1956), 107.

[44]Stallman, "Huck Finn Again," College English, XVIII (May 1957), 425.

[45]Macdonald, "Mark Twain: An Unsentimental Journey," The New Yorker, April 9, 1960, p. 175. Leslie Fiedler also thinks that the sentimentalized, fake "happy ending" mars the logic of Twain's own premises. See Fiedler, "As Free As Any Cretur," New Republic, August 15, 1955, p. 17.

journals as are those of his pessimism in later years, or of his writing technique. Two probable causes for the apparent disinterest in Twain as a humorist at the present time might be considered: in the first place, this topic had been explored rather extensively by earlier critics (Walter Blair's section on Twain in Native American Humor is an example); and secondly, for various reasons, the comic tradition has become unpopular in the mid-twentieth century. Edward Gordon regrets the decline in humorous writing and in its appreciation today. He believes that in the Atomic Age man takes himself too seriously and reacts too emotionally to appreciate humor, which is "an intellectual exercise."[46] Although academic studies of Twain's humor may be limited today, enjoyment of his skillful handling of the techniques of burlesque and satire by millions of readers is not. The modern reader appreciates Mark Twain's forward-looking mind and discovers that his humor, under the guise of exaggeration or burlesque, is often profound. "Always in Twain," Kenneth Lynn remarks, "the best jokes reveal the profoundest connections . . . ."[47] Of Mark Twain's development as a humorist, Robert Spiller writes: "Humor is often the result

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[46]Gordon, "What's Happened to Humor?" English Journal, XLVII (March 1958), 127-129.

[47]Kenneth Lynn, Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1959), p. 213.

of an overacute sensibility balanced by a more than usual endurance. To see the incongruities of life and to tolerate them is to laugh."[48]

Mark Twain never lost his confidence in the value of laughter; it is one of mankind's great blessings, as young Satan suggested in The Mysterious Stranger. Twain wrote:

> . . . humor is the great thing, the saving thing, after all. The minute it crops up, all our hardnesses yield, all our irritations and resentments flit away, and a sunny spirit takes their place.49

The humorist meant his work to fill this need; he knew the therapeutic value of humor. "The comic view, through all myth and legend, does not contradict man's defeat, but rather transcends it."[50]

In 1937 Walter Blair caught the essence of Twain's gradual perfection of his humorous technique: ". . . he moved from the role of literary comedian to the accomplishment of a literary artist . . . ."[51] Most critics of the thirties accepted Twain's artistry, but they minimized his achievement by insisting, as did Constance Rourke, that "he

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[48]Robert Spiller, The Cycle of American Literature (New York: The New American Library, 1957), p. 120.

[49]Clemens, "What Paul Bourget Thinks of Us," Literary Essays, The Writings of Mark Twain, XXII, 163.

[50]Gordon, 133.

[51]Blair, Native American Humor (New York: American Book Company, 1937), p. 160.

was never the conscious artist, always the improviser."[52] It is interesting to observe the about-face Edward Wagenknecht has made in his 1961 revision of Mark Twain: The Man and His Work, originally published in 1935. In an apologetic Preface to the revision he writes:

> In common with a great many other students of Mark Twain in the thirties, I overstressed the idea that he was a kind of folk artist and understressed his skill and ability as a bona fide man of letters.[53]

Wagenknecht now concludes that "the notion that Mark Twain was a kind of unconscious artist has been demolished by many scholars."[54] One of the scholars who helped to dispel the idea that Twain's art was merely a lucky accident and not the result of conscious craftsmanship is Gladys Bellamy. In Mark Twain as a Literary Artist she assembles proof for her theory that Twain was much more the conscious artist than most people had believed. She refutes earlier ideas held by Van Wyck Brooks and Bernard DeVoto that Twain was an improviser and hails him "as a professional author, as craftsman, indeed as literary artist."[55] Another scholar

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[52] Rourke, American Humor, A Study of the National Character (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1931), p. 211.

[53] Wagenknecht, Mark Twain: The Man and His Work, Revised Edition (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), p. viii.

[54] Ibid., p. ix.

[55] Bellamy, Mark Twain as a Literary Artist (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), p. vii.

whose work on Twain has just been published acknowledges that he began his study of Twain's writing techniques with Gladys Bellamy's theories in mind. He writes:

> Huckleberry Finn . . . is the culmination of a long period in which Twain evolved a highly complex structural technique. It is not at all accurate to say, as Andrews says, "Its greatness cannot be attributed to conscious skill and its success testifies not to art but to instinct." Nor is it accurate to say, as DeVoto says, of Mark Twain as craftsman, "He had little ability to impose structure on his material; he could not think and feel it through to its own implicit form." He did indeed think his material through; he struggled to find the proper form. Critics may disagree with Twain on the suitability of the form he chose and suggest other forms they consider better, but Twain sought for and found the form he thought best. . . . Mark Twain's masterpiece is the result of long deliberation and careful craftsmanship.[56]

Recognition of the fact that Twain diligently practiced his craft has been furthered in the past two years by Sidney Krause and Walter Blair. Both these researchers agree that the revisions and corrections Twain made in his manuscripts show the work of a skilled craftsman, as DeLancey Ferguson had suggested earlier. Krause writes that "our respect for Twain's workmanship is greatly enlarged," and adds: "The fact that Twain painstakingly revised his work in every stage of composition would indicate a substantial amount of 'artistic consciousness.'" Twain's

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[56]Franklin Rogers, Mark Twain's Burlesque Patterns (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1960), pp. 160-161.

claim that he was merely the amanuensis of his imagination, Krause believes, has been taken too literally. He concludes:

> Twain's views on writing deserve serious analysis. Analysis affirms their worth both independently as theories and as a set of personal objectives which helped him to shape his methods of composition.[57]

Twain's own pretense that his writing ability was more the result of luck than effort delayed any accurate estimate of his literary artistry. In the mid-twentieth century scholars realized that Twain's perfection of style was the result of practice and revision. A reviewer of the _Mark Twain-Howells Letters_ observes:

> The notion that Twain was not, all faults being freely granted, a deeply serious writer behind his role of professional entertainer dies hard. So does the notion--built on arbitrary excerpts and given its most extravagant statement years ago by Van Wyck Brooks--that Twain's genius was stunted by his culture, emasculated by those genteel representatives of that culture, his wife and his friend. But if the patient work

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[57]Krause, "Twain's Method and Theory of Composition," 171, 177. See also John B. Hoben, "Mark Twain: on the Writer's Use of Language," _American Speech_, XXXI (October 1956), 163-171; and a discussion and analysis of Twain's changes in the manuscript of _Huckleberry Finn_ in Walter Blair, _Mark Twain and Huck Finn_, pp. 351-354. Researchers are also comparing Twain's early stories with his later work to demonstrate that he constantly worked to improve his style. For analyses of samples of his apprentice work, together with bibliographies, see Edgar Branch, _The Literary Apprenticeship of Mark Twain_, and "A Chronological Bibliography of the Writings of Samuel Clemens to June 8, 1867," _American Literature_, XVIII (May 1946), 109-159; Minnie M. Brashear, "Mark Twain's Juvenilia," _American Literature_, II (March 1930), 25-53; and Henry Nash Smith, _Mark Twain of the Enterprise_ (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957).

> of more recent scholars has not laid such notions . . . perhaps these letters may.58

From the time of his death, over fifty years ago, to the present moment, Mark Twain's literary reputation has undergone many metamorphoses. It has been the aim of this paper to show how these changes have often reflected the major critical attitudes of each generation. In the first half of the twentieth century there was a steadily increasing flow of critical literature on Mark Twain, culminating in a tributary outburst of popular and academic acclaim in the 1960 anniversary year. He has been pictured successively as a colorful personality, a psychological or social puzzle, a projection of an idealized American frontier, and finally as a true literary artist. It has been shown that the narrower, older views have been superseded by a finer appreciation of Twain's contributions to literature. The times have caught up with Mark Twain, and now critics realize that "to remember him only as a creator of boyhood adventure or as a relic of an American frontier or the voice of native idiosyncrasy is to do him disservice."[59]

Mark Twain's <u>oeuvre</u> will continue to provide many enigmas for future critics and scholars to explore. Critics

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[58]Howard C. Horsford, "Forty Years of Friendship," <u>Nation</u>, May 14, 1960, pp. 426-427.

[59]Lewis Leary, <u>Mark Twain</u> (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1960), p. 44.

with different approaches to literature will continue to find points of dissension, but as new interpretations come closer to a more accurate estimate of his work, doubtless they will move toward agreement. For example, Lionel Trilling, who, as a sociologically oriented critic, is somewhat dubious about the methods of the New Critics, often concurs with T.S. Eliot, a leader of the New Critics, when it comes to evaluating Twain. The possibilities for further research are not exhausted. Many letters, stories, and notes remain among the unpublished papers of the Mark Twain Estate. As these withheld manuscripts are added to the general knowledge, they will generate new interest and stimulate scholarship. In the Mark Twain Papers at Berkeley, California, are stories of fantastic voyages " in a phantasmagoric universe, a million miles from reality," which are "startlingly Poe-like in their weird symbolism and psychological atmosphere."[60] Such items, when published, are expected to shed new light on the author's complex personality.

It seems that no phase of Mark Twain's life and work has been neglected in the unending procession of books, articles, and dissertations on Twain both in America and abroad. New studies are appearing at such a rapid rate that a scholar's information is in danger of being outdated,

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[60]Lynn, Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor, p. 274.

even before it is published. And earlier Twain specialists like Edward Wagenknecht are hastening to revise their opinions in the light of new research and new attitudes resulting from the changing outlook on life. "So Huck on a raft, as profoundly symbolic today as Thoreau in his cabin, is ever more meaningful as our national experience hurtles us along routes more menacing than the Mississippi."[61]

Mark Twain's reputation emerges at mid-twentieth century as that of a true humorist as well as a superb writer whose books are the best guarantee that his literary fame will suffer no eclipse in the future. "Ultimately, literature like the plastic arts . . . is a chorus of voices --articulate throughout the ages--which asserts man's defiance of time and destiny, his victory over impermanence, relativity, and history."[62] Mark Twain's voice--speaking eloquently through the weapon of laughter--transcends time as he speaks for man's freedom from false ideals. Such a voice was never more needed than it is today.

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[61]Branch, "Mark Twain and J.D. Salinger . . . ,", p. 157.

[62]René Wellek, "Literary Theory, Criticism, and History," Sewanee Review, LXVIII (March 1960), 19.

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