The Life and Work of Mark Twain
Part I
Professor Stephen Railton
Stephen Railton, Ph.D.
Professor of English, University of Virginia

In his career as one of the most popular professors at the University of Virginia, Stephen Railton has taught more than 5,000 students, always with the same enthusiasm for American literature as a subject and the classroom as a site of intellectual challenge and growth. He came to Virginia from Columbia University, where he received his B.A. in 1970, his M.A. in 1971, and his Ph.D. in 1975.

Dr. Railton has published numerous articles on American writers from Poe to Steinbeck, including, of course, Mark Twain. Among his books are Fenimore Cooper: A Study of His Imagination and Authorship and Audience: Literary Performance in the American Renaissance (both published by the University of Princeton Press). He is currently working on two books about Mark Twain, Mark Twain: A Brief Introduction (forthcoming from Blackwell Press) and Being Somebody: Samuel Clemens’ Career as Mark Twain.

Dr. Railton has also created two award-winning Web-based electronic archives, intended to explore the uses of electronic technology for teaching and studying American literature—Uncle Tom’s Cabin & American Culture (http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/utc) and Mark Twain in His Times (http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/railton). These sites are ongoing projects. In the five years they have been on-line, more than two million users have visited them.
# Table of Contents

The Life and Work of Mark Twain
Part I

Professor Biography .............................................................................................................. i
Course Scope ........................................................................................................................ 1
Lecture One Needing No Introduction? ................................................................. 2
Lecture Two From Samuel Clemens to Mark Twain ....................... 4
Lecture Three The Sense of Mark Twain’s Humor ......................... 6
Lecture Four Marketing Twain ................................................................. 8
Lecture Five *Innocents Abroad*, I: Going East ....................... 10
Lecture Six *Innocents Abroad*, II: Traveling to Unlearn ........... 12
Lecture Seven *Roughing It*: Going West ........................................ 14
Lecture Eight The Lecture Tours .................................................. 16
Lecture Nine The Whittier After-Dinner Speech ..................... 18
Lecture Ten “Old Times on the Mississippi” ................... 20
Lecture Eleven *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* .................... 22
Lecture Twelve The Performances of Tom Sawyer .......... 24
Illustrations ....................................................................................................................... 26
Timeline ......................................................................................................................... 31
Glossary .............................................................................................................................. 34
Biographical Notes ........................................................................................................... 35
Bibliography ....................................................................................................................... 37
The Life and Work of Mark Twain

Scope:

To William Dean Howells, he was “the Lincoln of our literature.” To Ernest Hemingway, he was the father of “all modern American literature.” For generations of Americans, his image has been as familiar as the most recent pop celebrities. In this course, we will explore Mark Twain as both one of our classic authors and as an almost mythic presence in our cultural life as a nation.

A main goal will be to appreciate the achievement of his best, most representative works. Fourteen of the course’s twenty-four lectures will focus on seven specific major texts: *Innocents Abroad*, his first and, in his time, most popular book (Lectures Five and Six); *Roughing It*, the narrative of his misadventures in the West (Lecture Seven); “Old Times on the Mississippi,” his thoroughly satisfying account of learning to be a riverboat pilot (Lecture Ten); *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, his first novel about the world he grew up in and a permanent contribution to the world’s literature about childhood (Lectures Eleven and Twelve); *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, a text that has been both repeatedly banned and, at the same time, nominated for the title Great American Novel (Lectures Thirteen through Sixteen); *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, Twain’s serio-comic fantasy in which the Old World collides with the New (Lectures Seventeen through Nineteen); and *The Tragedy of Pudd’nhead Wilson*, Twain’s last published novel about the slave-holding village world of his childhood (Lecture Twenty). There are also separate lectures on major elements of his imaginative life: humor and entertainment (Lecture Three), as well as satire and political protest (Lecture Twenty-One).

Throughout the course, we will also locate these works in the contexts of Samuel Clemens’s life and Mark Twain’s career, as well as the cultural times in which they were written. Lecture Two provides an overview of his dramatically eventful biography. Lecture Four explains how his books were published and marketed. Two other lectures cover Twain’s ambitions and achievements (and one conspicuous flop) as a stand-up performer in front of live audiences: as itinerant lecturer (Lecture Eight) and as after-dinner speaker (Lecture Nine). The final three lectures use the last decade of his career to investigate the complex and often contradictory meanings of his story as cultural hero and private human being. Lecture Twenty-Two focuses on his apotheosis as one of the best-known and most deeply loved American selves through the series of public triumphs that marked the end of his life. Lecture Twenty-Three looks behind that white-suited figure at the alienated, embittered man few of his contemporaries imagined existed and at some of the dozens of unfinished, unpublished texts in which he tried to make sense of his spectacular career. Lecture Twenty-Four considers Mark Twain’s significance for twentieth-century America and beyond.

Throughout the course, we will undertake to discover what Mark Twain and America say about each other. For access to what he said, we will use a wide range of his texts, from the most familiar to ones that still remain known mainly to Twain scholars. To appreciate the meaning his works and image had for America, we will take account of contemporary reviews, articles, and obituaries. We will look at both what the image of “Mark Twain” has stood for and what it masks.
Lecture One

Needing No Introduction?

Scope: This lecture introduces students to the questions that will organize the course and indicates the specific ways that the lectures to come will try to answer those questions. What did “Mark Twain” mean to America? This course will look outward to consider the reasons for the extraordinary popularity of both Twain’s works and his image with American audiences. What did “Mark Twain” mean to Samuel Clemens? We will also look inward to explore the relationship between the public “Mark Twain” and the private ambitions, satisfactions, and frustrations of the man who created him. We begin answering these questions by discussing what is in the name “Mark Twain” itself.

Outline

I. In some ways, “Mark Twain” needs no introduction. His image—white suit, mane of hair, cigar, and so on—remains familiar even a century after his death. But image is not everything.
   A. Although this course will pay considerable attention to the way Samuel Clemens created and shaped Mark Twain’s public image, we will also keep trying to look behind the scene of its performance to discover what it can tell us about national and personal identity.
   B. Throughout the course, we will be guided by two large questions.
      1. What has “Mark Twain” meant to the American audience that made him such a celebrity?
      2. What did “Mark Twain” mean to the man who created him, that is, to Samuel Clemens?

II. What did “Mark Twain” stand for to American readers?
   A. The obvious answer—humor—is a good one, and we will discuss the art of humor as Twain practiced it.
   B. But we will also explore the ways in which he helped define a national culture, helped his American contemporaries locate themselves as Americans in space and time.
      1. In his books about the past, he helped Americans define where they came from.
      2. In his public persona, he provided them with a wonderful image of what they were, a best American self.
      3. In his rise from obscurity to international fame, he also gave them an empowering idea of where, as a coming world power, they were going.
   C. Throughout the course, we will answer this question chiefly by looking closely at the major texts, from *Innocents Abroad* through *Pudd’nhead Wilson*.

III. What did “Mark Twain” mean to Samuel Clemens?
   A. The imagination of Samuel Clemens created a number of great characters, but “Mark Twain” was the greatest, most complex of all his fictions.
   B. By exploring the relationship between Clemens’s ambitions and his performance as Mark Twain, we will also explore the issue or mystery of identity, of the way people invariably perform their “selves” through the roles they play in relationships with other people.
   C. Throughout the course, we will discuss the issues of performance, popularity, success, identity, and the related themes of freedom and autonomy, both as elements in Twain’s public career and as major themes in his fictions.
   D. His novels not only helped America express itself, but they were also Twain’s attempt to try to understand himself.

IV. To introduce these themes, we must consider the origins and implications of the pseudonym Clemens chose and look at one of his humorist sketches that nonetheless evokes the seriousness with which he engaged the issue of identity.
   A. As his famous pen name, “Mark Twain” can be traced to his experience as a Mississippi riverboat pilot or, as some have suggested, to his drinking habits in the Nevada Territory. As a sentence, however, “mark twain” also means “note the two.”
1. There are a lot of “two’s” or “twins” to note in Twain’s work, including Tom and Huck.
2. Twain was especially fascinated with the idea of Siamese twins—two separate personalities trapped inside a single body.
3. As we will explore at the end of the course, during the last decade or so of his life, Clemens in a sense wore two faces—the public image of the beloved humorist and the private life of an embittered nihilist.

B. In a brief sketch from the middle of his career titled “Encounter with an Interviewer,” Twain tells the story of his deceased twin brother. It is wholly fictional (Clemens had no twin), but when it ends with the unsolved mystery of which twin really died, it uses humor to tell a suggestive truth about the drama of Clemens’s life and Twain’s career.

Essential Reading:
Mark Twain, “Encounter with an Interviewer” (in Budd).

Questions to Consider:
1. When you hear the two words “Mark Twain,” what images and associations come to mind?
2. What Twain quotations have you heard others use and in what contexts? How are his words and sayings part of the speech of America’s culture?
Lecture Two
From Samuel Clemens to Mark Twain

Scope: This lecture is organized chronologically around the story of Samuel Clemens’s life, from his birth in 1835 to his death in 1910. It will give students an overview of the larger biography before we proceed to discuss specific episodes and chapters in it. The overview emphasizes two aspects of the biography: those facts of Clemens’s private life that have the most relevance to the work of his imagination, and the public narrative of Clemens’s other self—Mark Twain—from his “birth” as a newspaper reporter, to his emergence as a humorist, to his literary successes and failures, to his final apotheosis as world figure.

Outline

I. In the lectures that follow, we will often locate Twain’s works in the context of specific moments in Clemens’s biography. This lecture is intended as a (necessarily) brief overview of the whole seventy-five years of Clemens’s life and the forty-five-year-long national career of the writer and entertainer he named Mark Twain.
A. Students who want more of the story are referred to the course bibliography, which lists the best biographies.
B. This overview is organized into six stages and focuses on the aspects of Clemens’s personal life that played the most significant roles in his literary career.

II. 1835–1855: Clemens was born in Florida, Missouri (not Hannibal), at the end of 1835, the third of four children. Before he turned four, the family had moved to Hannibal, on the banks of the Mississippi.
A. His father died when Clemens was eleven; his chief legacies were inordinate hopes for wealth coupled with a series of business failures that left his survivors struggling for subsistence.
B. Missouri was a slave state. Twain later said that as a child, he had no reason ever to think there was anything wrong with slavery.
C. When he was seventeen, Clemens ran away to the big cities of the East—New York and Philadelphia—though he soon returned to the river.

III. 1855–1865: Although Clemens was associated with writing from the time his father died, mainly through his jobs in printing offices, as a young adult, he was not thinking of literature as a career.
A. In 1857, he apprenticed himself to Horace Bixby to learn to be a steamboat pilot, then plied that trade for two years, between 1859 and 1861. In 1874, he wrote, “I loved the profession far better than any I have followed since.”
B. When the outbreak of the Civil War closed the river, Clemens enlisted for two weeks as a soldier in an irregular Confederate unit; his only account of this episode is the highly colored, comic “Private History of a Campaign That Failed.”
C. Deserting the Confederacy, in the summer of 1861, Clemens traveled with his older brother, Orion, to the silver fields of Nevada, vowing not to return home until he had made his fortune as a miner.
D. Failure as a prospector led Clemens to become a newspaper reporter who, by 1863, began signing his articles “Mark Twain.” In that identity, he finally found a way to succeed, becoming nationally known in 1865 when his humorous sketch about a jumping frog made millions of readers laugh.

IV. 1865–1875: This period can be symbolized by the trip Clemens took as a traveling correspondent to Europe and the Holy Land in 1867 and the two valuable souvenirs he brought back.
A. From the newspaper letters he wrote on the voyage, Mark Twain derived his first book, Innocents Abroad, which quickly became a bestseller in 1869.
B. On the trip, he was shown a picture of Olivia Langdon, only daughter of a wealthy merchant in Elmira, New York. Their marriage in 1870 lifted Clemens into the upper class, as marked by the house his father-in-law bought for the couple in Buffalo (with three servants) and the even larger house Clemens built for his family in Hartford (with seven servants).
V. 1875–1885: This was the most productive period in Twain’s career and probably the happiest in Clemens’s life.

A. As a writer, he published five books, including the two—Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn—on which his permanent reputation most securely rests.

B. As a man, he suffered the loss of his first child, an infant son named Langdon, but doted on the two daughters born during the decade—Olivia Susan (Susy) and Clara (a third daughter, Jean, was born in 1880).

C. He was unsatisfied enough, however, to begin investing much of his income from literature in various schemes, including his own publishing company, intended to make him much, much richer.

VI. 1885–1895: These were years of commercial struggle and collapse.

A. Although Clemens lost money through a number of ventures, including his publishing company, the symbolically and financially central factor in his failure was a typesetting machine developed by an inventor named Paige. Clemens lost more than $200,000 to it over about a decade and was finally forced to declare bankruptcy in 1894.

B. During these years, he wrote under duress, needing capital to keep his ventures alive, but the two main novels from the decade—A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court and Pudd’nhead Wilson—although flawed artistically, are perhaps his most complex books thematically.

VII. 1895–1910: At the end of his life, Clemens recovered financially but not emotionally or imaginatively.

A. With the business help of a Standard Oil magnate and the profits from a bravura lecture tour “around the world,” Clemens enjoyed prosperity during his final years.

B. At home and abroad, he shone as perhaps the most brilliant American star in the constellation of fame, loved as a humorist, admired as a man of honor and character, respected as a writer.

C. Two deaths in his family—those of his favorite daughter, Susy (1896), and his wife, Livy (1902)—left wounds that never healed.

D. And behind the genial mask “Mark Twain” wore was a man almost no one knew—an embittered and anguished author who wrote thousands of pages he never published, telling stories of disaster and futility that he could not finish and raging against “the damned human race.”

Supplementary Reading:
Kaplan, Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain.
Wecter, Sam Clemens of Hannibal.

Questions to Consider:
1. How does Clemens’s life (and Twain’s career) resemble the kind of American dream that Horatio Alger, Clemens’s contemporary and fellow writer, wrote about as the “rags to riches” success story?

2. How does Clemens’s life recall the darker version of that narrative that F. Scott Fitzgerald told as James Gatz’s transformation of himself into The Great Gatsby?
Lecture Three
The Sense of Mark Twain’s Humor

Scope: In this lecture, we begin looking closely at Twain’s work as a writer. Because most people, when they hear the name “Mark Twain,” either smile or get ready to laugh, we start with humor. After discussing Clemens’s ambivalence about being a “humorist,” the lecture explores the art of Twain’s humor by looking at what he says in “How to Tell a Story” and what he does in “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County” and “The Story of the Bad Little Boy.” Finally, we will turn from analyzing the means of Twain’s humor to a consideration of its ends, including the ultimately serious purpose he felt laughter could serve as a way to destroy falsehoods and liberate the mind.

Outline

I. At the center of all the various things “Mark Twain” stood for, in his times and since, is “humor.” In promoting *Huckleberry Finn*, for instance, his publishing company didn’t advertise it as a “great American novel” or even as a “work of literature,” but rather as a “mine of humor.” Readers of his last travel book, *Following the Equator*, were promised “nearly 700 pages” with “a laugh on every page.”

A. Twain had mixed feelings about this identity from the start.
   1. In the letter to his brother announcing that he had at last found his niche, that he had a “calling to literature,” he added, “literature of a low order—that is, humorous,” then added in one more sentence, “poor pitiful business.”
   2. He knew that his wife thought “a humorist is something awful.”
   3. He claimed that the best, and his own favorite, among all his books was the devoutly unfunny *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*.

B. Nonetheless, the task of “exciting the laughter of God’s creatures” became his lifework. In this lecture, we will focus on the art of Twain’s humor and why, to him, it was ultimately a serious business.

II. The first example is one of Twain’s most well known short pieces: “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County.” It was published in a New York newspaper in 1865, then widely reprinted across the country, and though the frog never jumped, its success gave Twain his first taste of celebrity status. Although he later called the story “a villainous backwoods sketch,” it is actually very sophisticated in its deployment of comic ironies. It’s a story about a story about a story.

A. At the center are the enthusiastic Jim Smiley, his educated frog, and the con man, the mysterious stranger who takes advantage of them both.

B. The joke at the center is a cliche of frontier humor. But we can begin to appreciate the art of Twain’s humor by noting how he tells it. As he wrote much later, in the essay “How to Tell a Story,” a humorous story must be “told gravely”—by which he means that “the teller does his best to conceal the fact that he even dimly suspects there is anything funny about it.”
   1. The term most often used to describe this technique is “deadpan” humor.
   2. It was not original with Twain, but this sketch shows how even this early, he was a master of the technique. The story of Smiley’s discomfiture is told seriously by old Simon Wheeler, and behind his deadpan is the narrator, “Mark Twain,” who repeats the story peevishly. The joke is on everyone—the frog, Smiley, Wheeler, and Mark Twain—everyone except the stranger, who walks off with the bet, and the reader, who complacently looks down on all the characters, even the ones telling the story.

C. In a novel like *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain puts this deadpan technique to still more subtle and profound ironic uses. Even in that novel, however, an ultimate rhetorical effect of using narrators who don’t understand what they’re really saying is to privilege the reader, to give the audience a superior point of view from which to enjoy the comedy.
III. “The Story of the Bad Little Boy Who Did Not Come to Grief” (also first published in 1865) is much less familiar than “The Jumping Frog,” but it provides a good occasion for exploring what Twain got his readers to laugh at.

A. The sketch is a typical example of Twain’s use of burlesque humor—being funny by imitating, exaggerating, and exposing another work or genre.

B. In this sketch, Twain’s point of departure is the conventional, didactic, nineteenth-century children’s story in which bad behavior is invariably punished.

C. Most of Twain’s major work can be understood as some form of burlesque—starting with a conventionally or culturally solemn “text” of some kind, often a book, but not necessarily so, he then sets out to make it ridiculous.

D. The idea that Connecticut Yankee grew from is a good example of the way he made fun by making fun of culturally sacred cows: in his “dream of being a knight in armor,” unlike romantic conceptions of that figure, he itches—though his armor won’t let him scratch.

IV. Early in his career, Twain’s comedy was often attacked as, essentially, blasphemous. By his death, however, Twain was almost universally admired for his iconoclasm, his irreverent attacks on pretense, sham, and hypocrisy.

A. In one of his late autobiographical dictations (1906), Twain says that as a humorist, “I have always preached.”

1. To Twain himself, his humor served a realistic agenda. Staged as burlesque exaggerations or impossibly tall tales, these routines nonetheless brought listeners and readers closer to reality by exposing idealizations and illusions.

2. This was also part of a democratic agenda: by toppling the idols off their pedestals, he worked to level hierarchic distinctions.

B. It is important to note, though, that Twain’s form of preaching does not work by uplifting, but rather, explicitly, by tearing down, cracking up. The definitive statement of the faith Twain had in humor’s destructive power to save is made by a character called Satan in one of “The Mysterious Stranger” manuscripts: “Against the assault of Laughter nothing can stand.”

Essential Reading:
Mark Twain, “Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog,” “The Story of the Bad Little Boy,” and “How to Tell a Story” (in Budd).

Supplementary Reading:
Covici, Mark Twain’s Humor.
Cox, Mark Twain: The Fate of Humor.
Lynn, Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor.
Sloane, Mark Twain as a Literary Comedian.

Questions to Consider:
1. How would you compare Mark Twain as a nineteenth-century “humorist” to the kinds of stand-up comics we are so widely exposed to in our time?

2. Do you agree that laughter is a good weapon to use against human and social frailties?
Lecture Four
Marketing Twain

Scope: Although in many ways an original genius, Mark Twain was also the product of American culture, whose works were shaped by the conditions of literary and popular performance of his time and place. Unlike most artists, Twain frankly, even exuberantly, announced that he wanted to make a lot of money from his imagination. This lecture will look specifically at the way his books were written, published, packaged, advertised, and sold. In particular, it will explain the dynamics of subscription publishing, a mode of publication that influenced Twain’s books, including his masterpiece *Huckleberry Finn*.

Outline

I. Mark Twain enthusiastically embraced the idea of wealth or—to use the kind of vernacular we associate with his characters—he spent his life trying to strike it very rich.
   A. Like a lot of his contemporaries in the Gilded Age, Twain was irresistibly drawn to investments and speculations.
      1. Many of these involved what his times called “the latest inventions,” or what we would call “cutting-edge technologies”: the most expensive of these investments was the Paige Typesetting Machine, from which he hoped to make millions but wound up losing hundreds of thousands.
      2. In the middle of his career, in the quest for greater profits, he capitalized his own publishing company.
   B. He may be the only person, and certainly he was the only author, ever to trademark his own name.
   C. And unlike most authors, he was always frank about his own books as commercial products, as salable commodities.
      1. When approached by a publisher for the first time, Twain wrote back to ask “what amount of money” he might make from publishing a book and added that the question “has a degree of importance for me which is almost beyond my own comprehension.”
      2. He told his friend William Dean Howells, editor of the prestigious *Atlantic Monthly*, that he could not “afford” to allow the magazine to publish *Tom Sawyer*.

II. Twain’s major books were published by the subscription method, which meant that Americans did not buy them in bookstores but from door-to-door sales agents.
   A. Although Twain was just about the only recognized author who ever used it, subscription publishing flourished in the last third of the nineteenth century.
   B. Subscription sales were made by an army of book agents who spread out across the nation in advance of a book’s publication.
      1. They were armed with a prospectus of the forthcoming book, often called a “salesman’s dummy,” that contained a sampling of its contents, including text, illustrations, design, and bindings.
      2. Publishers provided these agents with careful instructions in sales techniques and a series of talking points about the book they were selling.
      3. The agent’s income depended in large part on the binding he, or often she, could convince the buyer to choose from a range of options.
   C. Because of the agent’s commission, subscription books typically cost two to three times more than conventionally published books. This meant that buyers expected specific material returns for their money: subscription books were long and heavily illustrated.
   D. Before Mark Twain, the most marketable subscription categories were religion, history, biography, and travel.

III. Twain liked the subscription system, especially its promise of high returns: anything else, he once wrote a fellow author, “is printing for private circulation.” His popularity allowed him to expand the conventions of the system. But this mode of publication had demonstrable effects on the books that he wrote.
   A. The most obvious effects are physical.
      1. He knew he had to make his books long enough to satisfy buyers’ expectations.
2. All his books are “copiously illustrated,” and these pictures unquestionably influenced the way they were understood and appreciated by contemporary readers.

B. The demands of the subscription system also shaped the way Twain’s books were advertised and marketed, which in turn shaped the way they were read.
   1. Like other brand names, “Mark Twain” came to be associated with certain dependable qualities—not art, nor even literature, but entertainment. Even the aesthetically revolutionary Huckleberry Finn was advertised as “A Return to Mark Twain’s Old Style.”
   2. Above all, readers were promised humor—at least one laugh, for example, for each of the 700 pages in Following the Equator.

C. Less tangibly, but perhaps most significantly, this intimate connection between writing and selling meant that Twain’s imagination was continuously obliged to think in terms of popularity, salability, and audience expectations.
   1. Decisions about what to write, or what to delete from or leave in his texts, were often business decisions rather than artistic ones.
   2. Finishing Huckleberry Finn in 1884, for example, Twain was not just writing a novel—he was also making the first product for his new publishing company to sell.

D. On the whole, Mark Twain and subscription publishing mutually enriched each other. But this method entailed clear imaginative and artistic costs for him, as well. This may help explain why, at the height of his popularity as a writer, he turned away from writing books and turned so enthusiastically to other ways to exploit writing to make money.
   1. In the mid-1880s, he hoped Huck Finn would be his last published book.
   2. At the same time, he invested more and more deeply in the publishing company and the typesetting machine.

**Essential Reading:**
Hill, ed., Mark Twain’s Letters to His Publishers.

**Supplementary Reading:**

**Questions to Consider:**
1. In general, do you think “art” and “business” are, or should be, separate realms? What are the potential effects of thinking of a “work of art” as a “consumer product”?
2. How would you probably have regarded a novel like Huckleberry Finn if you were being asked to buy it by a door-to-door salesperson (or his descendant, the telemarketer)? Do you think you would have purchased a copy that way?
Lecture Five

_Innocents Abroad, I: Going East_

**Scope:** This is the first of two lectures on Twain’s first book, which was the best-selling of all his books during his lifetime. The lecture begins by talking about the circumstances behind the book: the _Quaker City_ excursion of American tourists in 1867 to Europe and the Holy Land. The lecture goes on to discuss why Twain’s account of that journey was so popular among his contemporaries by contrasting his version of American innocence in Europe to Henry James’s international tales. Finally, it explores how Twain’s account helped America in the post-Civil War era to make the transition from its past as a colonial dependent of England to its imminent future as a world power.

**Outline**

I. There are at least two good reasons to look closely at Mark Twain’s first book, _Innocents Abroad_, first published in 1869.

   A. Although we think of Twain as primarily a novelist, during his career, the genre he was mainly associated with was travel writing.

   B. _Innocents Abroad_ was the best-selling of all his travel books; in fact, during his lifetime, it was easily the most popular of all his books.

   C. In this first of two lectures on the book, we will explore why it was so attractive to Twain’s American readers. In the next lecture, we will consider why travel as an idea was so attractive to Twain as a writer.

II. The book is based on Twain’s real experience as a traveler. In June 1867, he sailed on the _Quaker City_ steamship for a five-month tour of the European continent and the Middle East.

   A. His seventy-five fellow passengers were a genteel, well-to-do group.
      1. Fares and expenses averaged about $2,000, more than most Americans at the time earned in a year.
      2. The tour was organized by Rev. Henry Ward Beecher’s Brooklyn church and was designed to climax by visiting the biblical sites in the Holy Land.

   B. The excursion was probably the first time Americans ever traveled to the Old World as an organized tour group, but as Twain says in the book, by going eastward, he was sailing with “the tide of a popular movement.” In the years immediately after the Civil War, thousands of Americans undertook similar pilgrimages to the cultural shrines of Europe.

III. For American writers in that generation, the story of going eastward to confront the past, tradition, and the landscape of the Old World could be told in two different ways.

   A. To Henry James, in stories like “Daisy Miller” and novels like _The American_ and _The Portrait of a Lady_, the story was a cautionary tale of American innocence and optimism challenged by the complexity and suffering of human experience, as symbolized by such sites as the Roman Colosseum.
      1. James’s “American”—Christopher Newman (named for Columbus but voyaging east to the Old World)—has a kind of “fall” and discovers the knowledge of good and evil.
      2. As Daisy Miller’s death in the Colosseum proves, to James, American innocence could prove fatal.

   B. As the title of Twain’s book makes clear, “innocence” was his starting point as well, but as he tells it, the story is a comedy rather than a tragedy. His narrative is typified by his first-person narrator’s experience in a Parisian barbershop (chapter 12).
      1. His acute disappointment is also a kind of fall, but the result of his discomfiture is to make readers laugh.
      2. In a scene like this, American readers are allowed to feel superior to both the naivete of “Twain” and the exposed pretensions of Europe itself. This scene of failed expectations recurs throughout the book, as even the supposed greatness of the “Old Masters” or the ruins of Rome or the canals of Venice are labeled “frauds” and “shams.”
IV. By narrating the account of his encounter with the Old World in a way that allowed his contemporary American readers to enjoy an unthreatened sense of superiority, Twain was satisfying a significant set of cultural desires.

A. The laughter he provokes was a way to liberate his reader from lingering anxieties about America’s culturally “colonial” status: instead of having to kneel reverently and humbly before such icons of the greatness of Europe’s culture as the Old Masters, Twain enabled the reader to look down on them and laugh at *their* inadequacies.

B. By taking on the world this way, determined to measure it by his own standards, Mark Twain was helping his culture make the transition from former colony to coming world power.

V. *Innocents Abroad* was so popular because it gave its audience so much, both physically and psychologically, for their money.

A. In addition to its mockery, it contains many passages of “fine-writing,” eloquent descriptions of cathedrals and ancient wonders. Complemented by the book’s hundreds of illustrations, such accounts gave people who could not afford the Grand Tour a way to be vicarious sightseers.

B. Its biggest selling point, as we can tell from reviews, was its humor. The secret of its comedy was that it did more than make people laugh. By offering readers the Old World as an occasion for their complacent entertainment, the book gave late nineteenth-century Americans an empowering way of being American in the world.

**Essential Reading:**
Mark Twain, *Innocents Abroad; or, The New Pilgrim's Progress*.

**Supplementary Reading:**
Ganzel, *Mark Twain Abroad*.

**Questions to Consider:**
1. Do you see any signs that America still feels anxious about its cultural inferiority to the Old World?
2. Could you argue that the traveler Mark Twain describes in *Innocents Abroad* is the proverbial “ugly American,” that is, the kind of tourist who goes to Paris but wants to eat at the McDonalds?
Lecture Six

_Innocents Abroad, II: Traveling to Unlearn_

Scope: This lecture examines Twain’s use of the motif of travel in _Innocents Abroad_ in the context of the larger significance traveling has in many of his works. It begins by discussing Twain as a travel writer. Then, by looking at the experience of his first-person narrator in _Innocents Abroad_, it explores what Twain meant when he said that travel is “fatal to prejudice.” In the contrasts he creates between his own experience and previous travel books, Twain uses travel as a form of “un-learning.” The lecture concludes by connecting this process with Twain’s agenda as a realist writer.

Outline

I. _Innocents Abroad_ is a good guidebook to some of Twain’s most persistent goals and concerns as a writer.
   A. It is the first, but hardly the last, of his many travel books.
      1. He wrote four other books in that genre: _Roughing It_ (1872), which we will discuss in the next lecture; _A Tramp Abroad_ (1880); _Life on the Mississippi_ (1893); and _Following the Equator_ (1897).
      2. Even his novels are often organized around the motif of the journey; the most obvious example is _Huckleberry Finn_, the story of a raft trip down a river.
   B. _Innocents Abroad_ gives us a good occasion to discuss the reasons why Twain was so attracted to the idea of traveling.

II. Twain’s imagination was drawn to the act of traveling for many reasons, some deeply personal, some others shrewdly professional.
   A. “I am wild with impatience to move—move—Move!” he wrote his mother while waiting in New York for the _Quaker City_ excursion to leave port. As she knew, because as Sam Clemens, he had already run away to New York at age seventeen, her son was temperamentally restless. He stayed on the move for much of his life: as steamboat pilot, roving correspondent, itinerant lecturer, and world traveler.
   B. Many of the most popular subscription books, including Twain’s, were accounts of travel to foreign or exotic lands.
      1. Subscription book buyers enjoyed facts, descriptions, and pictures.
      2. The length of typical books favored an episodic structure; Twain could always write more by adding a new leg to the journey (as he did when _Roughing It_ came up short: he interpolated his travel letters from Hawaii).
   C. From his point of view as a practicing humorist, Twain knew that travel could present all kinds of opportunities for laughter by creating all kinds of misunderstandings and misadventures, from trying to communicate in another language to trying to enjoy an especially exotic cuisine.

III. The deeper significance travel has in Twain’s work is indicated by the particular kind of misunderstanding that he was most interested in dramatizing: the existential encounter between a set of assumptions (preconceptions) and a series of new circumstances (perceptions), or between the idea of the world a traveler carries in his mind and the unfamiliar realities he meets on the journey.
   A. Twain offers this as the moral of _Innocents Abroad_: “Travel is fatal to prejudice.” Interestingly, he does not mean prejudices against the Old World so much as prejudices about it.
      1. He defines his goal in the Preface by promising to show his American reader what he would see if he looked at “Europe and the East with his own eyes instead of the eyes of those who traveled in those countries before him.”
      2. He indicates his emphasis when he says that while traveling in the Holy Land, to arrive at a “correct understanding” of the environment, he “must studiously and faithfully unlearn a great many things I have somehow absorbed.”
   B. For us to “un-learn” a great many things, as an author, _Twain_ has to “un-write” a great many books.
      1. Throughout _Innocents Abroad_ (as indeed throughout his career), Twain defines his vision in opposition to pretexts of various kinds: earlier travel books or novels or romances.
      2. He attacks these books in a variety of moods: burlesque, parody, irony, satire, even polemic.
3. He often includes passages from previous writers, then contrasts what they say is there with the reality he is determined to describe, as when, in chapter 48, he “strips” the account of Galilee of “Wm. C. Grimes” of its distortions.

C. To understand Twain as a literary realist, it helps to see him as an “un-writer.”

IV. In chapter 22, in Venice, contrasting the image books had given him of the “gorgeous gondolier” with the actual man rowing him down a canal, a “mangy guttersnipe” whose underwear is showing, Twain refers to the process as “this system of destruction.” That phrase raises a question that looms largest in the last section of *Innocents Abroad*, where the reality being seen is supposedly the “Holy Land” and among the books being challenged is the Bible.

A. He presents his critique of the Bible carefully, anxious not to shock the audience he was trying to entertain as well as instruct.

B. There are deep issues at stake for him, too.
   1. When, for example, in chapter 50, he actually looks at the niche from which it is written that the angel stepped to announce to Mary that she is pregnant with the son of God, Twain writes, “I could not fill [the] void,” and adds, “imagination labors best in distant fields.”
   2. It is one thing to strip away the lies that people have absorbed from books, but if seen without illusions, can reality itself be made meaningful, or will one only be left with what T. S. Eliot would call “a heap of broken images”? Already implicit in his first book, that is a question Twain would come back to often throughout his career.

**Essential Reading:**
Mark Twain, *Innocents Abroad; or, The New Pilgrim’s Progress*.

**Supplementary Reading:**
Bridgman, *Traveling in Mark Twain*.

**Questions to Consider:**
1. How do other works of literature use the idea of the journey?
2. Do you agree with Mark Twain that much of what we “know” is in fact only what we have been told is so by various authorities, such as the travel books he is trying to un-write? Through media, including television and the Internet, we now “see” the world in ways Twain’s readers never could have imagined, but do we see with our own eyes, or do we rely on those media to define what we are looking at?
Lecture Seven

Roughing It: Going West

Scope: This one lecture on Twain’s second book will focus on two stories. First, briefly, we will examine the story of the book: its composition by Twain, publication by the American Publishing Company, and reception by contemporary readers. Second, we will look in more detail at the story in the book, especially its unconventional hero and its setting. The hero of Roughing It is “Mark Twain,” as Clemens continued to develop the possibilities inherent in that figure. Its setting is the West that Clemens lived in between 1861 and 1866. Like “Mark Twain,” the “American West” is something between a reality and a myth, a place on the map and in the national imagination. In its last section, the lecture will explore that “West” as Twain helps to create and revise it.

Outline

I. Roughing It, Twain’s second book, was much harder for him to write than his first and never as popular with contemporary readers, but most scholars would say it ultimately proved more imaginatively productive.
   A. The book was based on his experiences (mostly, of course, as Sam Clemens) west of the Mississippi between 1861 and 1866.
   B. He wrote it (during 1870–1871) under difficult personal circumstances.
      1. He was adjusting to his new environment in Hartford.
      2. He and his wife struggled with a series of deaths and illnesses in the family.
   C. Without a series of newspaper letters as a starting point, Twain struggled to compose enough text to satisfy the demands of subscription publication.
      1. Bliss’s company advertised the book as “600–700 pages” long before Twain had finished writing it.
      2. The published text was in fact 591 pages, and to reach that number, Twain had to include his newspaper correspondence from the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) and three appendices.
   D. The finished book betrays the exigencies of its harried composition. It lacks the sense of unity and dramatic shape that Innocents Abroad acquires from both the voyage and the movement toward a climax in the Holy Land.
   E. Despite its unevenness, the book succeeds in bringing the character “Mark Twain” into clearer focus and in locating him in the American frontier.

II. Roughing It seems more autobiographical than Innocents Abroad because its author decided to use a version of himself as a means of organizing the narrative, though it is a highly fictionalized version.
   A. Although in fact Clemens was in his mid-thirties and a professional steamboat pilot when he decided to escape the Civil War by accompanying his brother Orion to Nevada in 1861, he depicts himself on the first page as a “young and ignorant” naif who “had never left home before.”
   B. This figure is as much a created persona as, say, Charlie Chaplin’s Little Tramp, and in both the text and the illustrations that were published with it, the narrator’s naivete provides an unfailing occasion for comedy.
      1. One of the most well known and frequently reprinted episodes from the book involves the tenderfoot’s attempt to ride the “Mexican Plug” horse he was been conned into buying (chapter 24).
      2. He is equally hapless as a prospector during Nevada’s “silver fever” (chapters 27 and 40–41).
   C. As a story about a “young man” who follows Greeley’s advice to “go west,” it is a kind of anti-success story—except that in the narrator’s repeated failures, the narrative keeps working the mother lode of humor.

III. While the narrator himself remains an outsider among the men of the frontier, the American “West” is depicted in ambivalent terms, as both inviting and disenchanting.
   A. It is a realm of dramatic contrasts.
      1. The glowing accounts of the life-giving sublimity of Lake Tahoe (chapter 23) can be matched by the terrifying emptiness of the Great American Desert (chapters 20–21).
The hero-worshipping descriptions of Pony Express riders and stagecoach drivers can be matched by the disillusioning encounters with “Indians” and outlaws.

Most of the time, these contrasts, too, are treated as occasions for humor, even the contrast between civilization and the frontier.

Another of the book’s well-known passages is the dialogue (chapter 47) between the vernacular character Scotty Briggs (who refers to dying with terms like “going up the flume”) and “a new fledgling from an eastern theological seminary” (who uses terms like “departed to that mysterious country from whose bourne no traveler returns,” instead).

In a work like *Huck Finn*, this kind of linguistic conflict is used humorously to dramatize serious ideological differences, but here, the gap between them remains merely funny.

The representation of “The West” in *Roughing It* is essentially of a land of opportunity for play, especially the play of the comic imagination.

The organizing joke of the narrative becomes clear at the very end, when Twain tells, in highly fictionalized fashion, the story of his first public lectures, his first live “Mark Twain” performances: by making his failures funny, he becomes a shining success.

Although based on the lectures he gave in San Francisco and Virginia City in the fall of 1866, chapters 78–79 allow others—the audiences in the text and the reader of the text—to enjoy the last laughs at his expense.

At the same time, in the audience’s amusement, Twain finds the gold and silver that had eluded him in the mountains of Nevada.

*Roughing It* opened up three new territories for Twain’s imagination to work in:

1. It turned him toward his own past.
2. It offered him practice in fictionalizing that past.
3. It identified him with vernacular American experience.

**Essential Reading:**

Mark Twain, *Roughing It*.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Benson, *Mark Twain’s Western Years*.

Steinbrink, *Getting to Be Mark Twain*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Twain jumped into national prominence as a California writer—the “wild humorist of the Pacific slope.” Is “the frontier” a significant part of what you associate with his image or work?

2. In what other ways has American culture defined or created the “West”?
Lecture Eight
The Lecture Tours

Scope: In his lifetime, millions of people read Mark Twain. But hundreds of thousands of people also saw Mark Twain perform on stage. In the next two lectures, we attend as closely as possible to the nature and meaning of his live performances. This lecture focuses on his lecture tours. It starts with the large picture: when and where he went on tour, what subjects he lectured on, how his performances were received. The lecture then moves in closer to discuss his appearance and behavior on the lecture platform: what he often referred to as the secrets of performing or of entertaining an audience. Because Twain often used his books as the basis for his lectures and his lectures to promote his books, we conclude by exploring the relationship between his written and his live performances.

Outline

I. During his career, Mark Twain was not only a best-selling author but also a very popular live entertainer. In this lecture, we will focus on his success as a platform speaker.
   A. Several hundred thousand people attended his various lectures, in more than two hundred American towns and cities, as well as in Great Britain and greater Britain, that is, the British colonies of Australia, New Zealand, India, and South Africa.
   B. He mounted five major lecture tours through the United States: three out of the four winters between 1868 and 1872, again when Huckleberry Finn was published in 1884–1885, and finally, as part of the “Around the World” tour he made in 1895–1896 to raise cash after his bankruptcy.
   C. Over the course of his career, the nature of these performances changed as his fame and popularity increased.
      1. The lecture he gave most often was “Our Fellow Savages of the Sandwich Islands”; his other early lecture topics were “The American Vandal Abroad” and “Roughing It,” both derived from his first two books.
      2. The Huck Finn tour—called “The Twins of Genius” because Twain shared the platform with George Washington Cable—included readings from his novel.
      3. By that point, he was not lecturing on an announced topic but performing selections from a large repertoire of anecdotes and stories, from “The Jumping Frog” to “The Golden Arm.”
   D. To appreciate what “Mark Twain” has meant to American culture, it is necessary to attend to the nature of these live performances, in which he enacted that identity directly in front of his audience.

II. The structure of his tours and the kind of talks he gave were largely defined by the lyceum system, a nineteenth-century institution created out of America’s love of oratory, its belief in moral uplift, and the lack of more popular forms of entertainment.
   A. Twain’s one-night stands in cities like Boston or towns like Fredonia, New York, were part of a larger “winter course” of lectures.
   B. Although he gave a few lectures in California mining camps, his audiences were typically middle class, well dressed, and refined.
   C. Twain was one of the few “humorous lecturers” working in this system.
      1. Some critics objected to his lectures as too entertaining, merely frivolous.
      2. Most newspaper reviews were positive, often praising Twain for regularly mixing instruction and eloquence (“sound substance”) with his humor.
      3. In these lectures, we can see how well Twain worked the line between making his listeners uncomfortable enough to laugh and satisfying their conventional expectations.

III. Twain himself acknowledged that the heart of live performance was not its matter, but its manner. His platform techniques, according both to the newspaper reports and his own accounts of “How to Tell a Story,” displayed a mastery of the performer’s art.
   A. Each lecture was carefully written out, rehearsed, and memorized, though to audiences it seemed spontaneous, conversational, artless.
B. Twain believed that his popular success was the result of several specific secrets:
   1. The “deadpan” technique that he learned from Artemus Ward, the first successful lyceum comic.
   2. The “pause,” the timing of which was crucial to the effect of such stories as “The Golden Arm,” his most frequently performed text.

C. Twain’s voice was one of his most distinctive, and funniest, assets.
   1. As one newspaper reviewer said, he talked “about three words to the minute.”
   2. Offstage, he talked about his drawl—“pulling his words”—as an “infirmity.” Onstage, it heightened the ludicrousness of whatever he was saying.
   3. If we identify him by his white suit, his audiences knew him by that voice.

IV. Twain had a love-hate relationship with his identity as an itinerant comic.
   A. He regularly announced his desire to retire from the stage.
      1. He disliked many aspects of touring.
      2. At times, he expressed real unhappiness with “making a buffoon” of himself, with being laughed at.
   B. He went back on tour for a number of reasons.
      1. It was very profitable financially.
      2. He pioneered the use of such tours to advertise and promote his books.
      3. His letters clearly testify to his love of mastering audiences.
   C. Performing for an audience was not just something he repeatedly did as Mark Twain; it was also something he repeatedly wrote about as Mark Twain. In his fiction, especially, putting on a show or addressing a crowd was a kind of signature scene, one we will discuss in later lectures.

Essential Reading:
Mark Twain, “Our Fellow Savages of the Sandwich Islands” (in Fatout).

Supplementary Reading:
Fatout, Mark Twain on the Lecture Circuit.
Lorch, The Trouble Begins at Eight.

Questions to Consider:
1. How do you think Twain would take advantage of our modern technologies for addressing an audience in person? What kind of television programs, for example, do you imagine he would show up on?
2. Can you think of other writers who invested their energies in performing? What kinds of roles do such performances play in defining the relationship between books and readers?
Lecture Nine
The Whittier After-Dinner Speech

Scope: Twain performed more than three hundred after-dinner speeches, to specific audiences on specific occasions. This lecture begins by describing the nature of such performances in general and showing how seriously Twain took the task of writing a speech to make his listeners laugh. Our main focus will be on one particular after-dinner speech: the burlesque Twain delivered in Boston in 1877 to the dignitaries assembled to celebrate John Greenleaf Whittier’s seventieth birthday. According to most accounts, the speech was a disaster, shocking rather than amusing its audience. Twain himself alternately thought of it as proof of his own “savage” nature and as one of the funniest things he ever wrote. We will discuss it in terms of the conflicts it reveals: between the eastern cultural establishment and the western frontier, between Whittier’s generation and Twain’s, between art as an idealization of life and as a confrontation with reality, and between different parts of Clemens’s own psyche—his longing for respectability and his need to rebel.

Outline

I. Besides the lecture tours, Mark Twain also came before his public in person more than three hundred times as a speaker at various banquets.
   A. The Gilded Age loved large glittering dinners as much as our time loves televised awards shows.
      1. The two kinds of occasions are culturally comparable in some respects, except that the celebrities at the dinners were not actors, actresses, musicians, and athletes, but military heroes, politicians, successful businessmen, and authors.
      2. At these lavish events, Twain’s contemporaries fed their bodies with many courses of heavy foods and their minds with hours of eloquent oratory.
      3. Up to a thousand well-dressed people attended such dinners, and hundreds of thousands read about them the next day in extensive newspaper coverage.
   B. Although he was typically only one of a dozen or more speakers, Twain took these events, and the task of making the audience laugh, very seriously.
      1. He prepared, memorized, and rehearsed his ten- to fifteen-minute speeches in advance.
      2. The manuscripts show him writing and revising with as much care as he used while writing any of his major texts.
   C. Although these live performances lose a lot when read, the best of them are among Twain’s funniest texts: the racy toast “To Women” in 1868, the comic attack on General Grant in the toast “To the Babies” (1879), and his own “Seventieth Birthday Speech” (1905).

II. The rest of this lecture will focus on one of those speeches. It was not his funniest performance—by almost all accounts, it bombed with its original audience—but it was his most dramatic: the speech he gave at the birthday dinner thrown in honor of John Greenleaf Whittier in December 1877.
   A. The event was a high cultural occasion.
      1. It was held in Boston’s Brunswick Hotel.
      2. It was sponsored by the Atlantic Monthly magazine.
   B. Most of the leading men of letters from Whittier’s generation were present, and the air was thick with reverence for what these figures meant to American society, as keepers of the flame of literature and culture.
   C. One letter read from the dais, for example, “venerated” presences like Whittier as “the most useful men we have in the development of the better elements of the American character.”
III. Twain’s speech to this audience was intended to be funny, along the familiar lines of his burlesque enjambments of high and low, sacred and profane. Using the voice of a California miner, he describes three tramps impersonating Emerson, Longfellow, and Holmes while getting drunk, cheating at cards, stealing boots, and so on. Twain’s own subsequent accounts of it are filled with ambivalence.

A. As William Dean Howells later diagnosed Twain’s mistake, in planning the speech, he had ignored “the species of religious veneration” in which such writers as Emerson were held. As he was giving it, Twain felt his listeners “seemed turned to stone with horror.”

B. A few days afterward, he wrote an abject letter of apology to Emerson, Longfellow, and Holmes for the way he had represented them, calling himself a “savage” for having delivered the speech.

C. Thirty years later, he re-read the speech several times, over a period of several weeks. His attitude toward it remained intensely conflicted. He alternately called it “as good as good can be,” “offensive and detestable,” and then, in his last recorded word, “admirable.”

IV. Organized around a series of juxtapositions, the performance says a lot both about American culture as it tried to cope with the wave of changes brought on by historical circumstances and Twain’s place as a “littery” man himself.

A. The most obvious contrast is between east and west, the refinement of the Atlantic and the rowdiness of the frontier.

B. The contrast is also generational, between the generation of Whittier and Emerson and younger American voices like Twain’s.

C. In terms of Twain’s career as an American writer, the most significant contrast is between two ideas of literature.

1. Writers like Whittier sought to embody the ideal in their art, to use the elegant forms of their poetry as a summons to a higher life.

2. In his speech, Mark Twain quotes samples from many of those poems—the miner refers to them as the “queer talk they used”: “between drinks they’d swell around the cabin and strike attitudes and spout.”

3. In trying to make his contemporaries laugh at the contrast between this elevated diction and the miner’s vernacular voice, and between the realm of the ideal and the real world of eating beans and playing cards, Twain is trying to assert the possibility of an American literature rooted in that real world.

4. “I didn’t want to sass such famous littery people, but you see they kind of forced me”—the miner says that in the speech, but it also indicates Twain’s aesthetic and psychic need to humorously defy genteel values.

V. This event played a decisive role in shaping the way Twain defined his public persona.

A. The hostile reaction to the speech in the press underlined the difference between amusing and shocking an audience and, thus, delimited the cultural place “Mark Twain” should occupy.

B. He would go on throughout his career to shake pedestals and threaten idols, but in the future, he would seldom attack such culturally immediate targets.

Essential Reading:
Mark Twain, “Whittier Birthday Speech” (in Budd).

Supplementary Reading:
Smith, The Development of a Writer, chapter 5.

Questions to Consider:
1. The miner notes that he “didn’t want to sass such famous littery people, but they kind of forced me.” Do you think Twain was being honest when he said he didn’t mean any disrespect by the humor in the speech?
2. However you feel about this address, would you agree with its critics that certain values or certain people need to be kept sacred, that not everything can or should be made laughable?
Lecture Ten
“Old Times on the Mississippi”

Scope: The series of memoirs about learning to be a riverboat pilot that Twain called “Old Times on the Mississippi” is among his best, most deeply humorous and satisfying texts. In this lecture, we will look closely and appreciatively at this one text. In particular, we will explore Twain’s use of himself as a cub and the steamboat pilot as a mythic hero as occasions for humor and nostalgia, though at the conclusion, we will consider the costs of these pleasures.

Outline

I. The series of articles Twain published in 1875 under the title “Old Times on the Mississippi” is one of his best works and played an important role in leading his imagination back to the past that became the setting of his most memorable fiction.
   A. Twain wrote the articles at the invitation of his friend William Dean Howells, editor of the Atlantic Monthly magazine.
      1. At the time, “Mark Twain” was still known essentially as a humorist, but publication in the Atlantic put him in the company of the nation’s most distinguished writers.
      2. The articles were published in seven installments, beginning in January 1875.
   B. A quasi-autobiographical account of his experience with steamboating on the Mississippi before the Civil War, the series made “riverboat pilot” as much a part of his image as, say, “big game hunter” became part of Hemingway’s.
   C. The series was favorably received at the time, and most critics since have agreed that it is one of his most sustained works of art.
      1. It is less well known today, because of the way in which Twain incorporated the series as chapters 4–17 in his Life on the Mississippi, one of his less successful travel books.
      2. For anyone who enjoys Twain, however, this text will repay any trouble it takes to find.

II. Although not rigorously structured as a narrative, the articles are organized around the story of Twain’s apprenticeship as a cub pilot to Horace Bixby, called Mr. B---- in the text.
   A. Mr. B---- is a master teacher: “when I say I’ll learn a man the river I mean it.”
   B. The deeper generic model for the series is the story of growth through education and experience, of innocence being replaced by knowledge.
      1. “Learning the river” is like learning life.
      2. Under Mr. B----’s tutoring, the cub develops his character, his courage, and confidence, as well as his specific piloting knowledge and skills.
      3. As with any story of innocence giving way to experience, the cub both loses and gains, as can be seen in his passage about learning to “read” the river.

III. Although Twain specifically told Howells it would be a relief from his usual performance as a “humorist” to write for the sophisticated readership of the Atlantic, we can see how hard he works in the articles to entertain and ingratiate himself with his readers.
   A. According to Twain, the Atlantic’s subscribers wouldn’t expect him to paint himself and stand on his head to amuse them.
   B. Nonetheless, he creates a richly comic narrative by casting himself as an impossibly naive and hapless “cub.”
      1. This inept “tenderfoot” persona is an extension of the character he created for himself in the travel narratives.
      2. Readers are allowed to patronize his gullibility, as when he sets out from Cincinnati to explore the upper reaches of the Amazon with $30 as his capital.
      3. Although the larger narrative is structured around the idea of his growth, each stage dramatizes scenes of his failure, often staged for the overt amusement of the boat’s crew.
C. The cub’s incompetence serves to bring into relief the heroism of the “lightning pilot,” especially Mr. B----.
   1. The other dramatized scenes in the series show the pilots’ absolute command of both their boats and
      the mighty Mississippi.
   2. Twain’s narrative places these men into the same heroic pantheon as such other great American
      figures as the backwoodsman (Boone, Crockett) or the riverboat man (Mike Fink). The “only entirely
      independent human beings that lived upon the earth,” the pilots are men as large as the river, as the
      continent itself.
   3. Thus, the “Old Times” become a mythic past, recovered through an act of reverent nostalgia.
D. Humor (laughing indulgently at the cub) and nostalgia (looking admiringly at the pilot) are the sources of
   the text’s irresistible charm.

IV. The pleasure the series gives American readers, however, is purchased at a price that should be acknowledged.
   A. To depict himself solely as the amusing cub, Twain has to leave out any account of his own achievement as
      a pilot.
      1. This is why the series lacks an ending: the traditional conclusion of the kind of story he is telling,
         reaching maturity, is inconsistent with the use he makes of himself as a comic vehicle.
      2. Twain may have had reasons to resent rewriting his proud memories of being a pilot as the
         embarrassing account of being an apprentice.
   B. The nostalgia of the series comes at a cultural price.
      1. The economic reasons for the boom in steamboating, including slavery and the transportation of
         cotton, are entirely erased.
      2. Even the presence of black slaves as the crews on most of the steamboats is barely acknowledged,
         though of course, that leadsman’s cry “mark twain” would have been called out by a black voice.

Essential Reading:

Supplementary Reading:

Questions to Consider:
1. What kinds of techniques does Mr. B---- use to teach the cub to be a pilot? (As a teacher, I consider this
   question often.)
2. How would the shape of this narrative change if we actually saw the cub mature and graduate from his
   apprenticeship, if it ended with him at the wheel of his own steamboat?
Lecture Eleven

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer

Scope: In this, the first of two lectures on one of Twain’s best-known and best-loved novels, we will explore the act of returning in time, to both Clemens’s remembered childhood and America’s imagined past. The lecture will begin with the story of the book’s original composition and publication in the mid-1870s. But most of the lecture will look closely at the story itself, with the larger goal of understanding why Tom Sawyer ultimately became one of his best-loved books. We will discuss the way the novel depicts the landscape of Clemens’s childhood and consider the reasons why Twain would have wanted to seek refuge in that world. In addition, we reckon the pleasures that the novel makes available to its readers: especially adult readers, longing to take a vacation from the actualities of adulthood, and American readers, longing for a way to connect with an earlier, an idealized, even (to borrow from the novel’s most famous scene) a white-washed America.

Outline

I. By the time Twain died, Adventures of Tom Sawyer was one of the best-loved American books. When it was first published, however, it was relatively unpopular: Innocents Abroad, for example, sold 70,000 copies in its first year, but Tom Sawyer sold only 24,000.
   A. Like all Twain’s books, it was “sold by subscription,” but a short novel was an unusual subscription book.
      1. The Gilded Age, which Twain co-wrote with Charles Dudley Warner and published in 1873, was the first novel ever published by the subscription method.
      2. That earlier novel was as long as a typical subscription book (600 pages), but Tom Sawyer contained fewer than half that many words. As we know from an account by Harriet Watson, a woman book agent who sold Tom in California, customers were displeased by the slimness of the book they had bought from a prospectus.
   B. There was also confusion in the way Tom Sawyer was marketed.
      1. As he was writing it, Twain thought of it as a book for adult readers.
      2. It was William Dean Howells who convinced him that it was actually a children’s book.
      3. Elisha Bliss, his publisher, nonetheless advertised and promoted it as an adult novel.

II. Even though the world now thinks of it as one of the great children’s books, it is better to read it as Twain wrote it—as a book about childhood but written for adults.
   A. The text itself is clearly written from a grown-up perspective. Readers see Tom and childhood through the eyes of a narrator who is looking back on them through an indulgent haze of memory and nostalgia.
      1. The narrator identifies himself and readers as adults.
      2. That narrative perspective turns the real cares of childhood, Tom’s sorrows and anxieties, into occasions for humor.
   B. This point-of-view probably reflects an original intention to use his characters to write a burlesque of sentimental romance and didactic children’s literature.
      1. The Tom and Becky Thatcher plot parodies conventional love stories.
      2. Unlike the boys in most contemporary books, Tom thrives by misbehaving.

III. But while Twain may have set out to write a book that was consistent with his agenda as a realist, using humor to deflate romantic and moral idealizations, he would up in Tom Sawyer writing perhaps his least realistic book.
   A. The novel stages a series of confrontations with what can be called the facts of life, which are repeatedly defeated by both Tom’s imagination and the spirit of play that presides over the world the novel depicts.
      1. The famous white-washing scene allows Tom to triumph over the fact of work.
      2. When the boys actually find a treasure, make-believe triumphs over money.
      3. Most impressive of all, death is defeated, imaginatively, when Tom is enabled to attend his own funeral, thus gratifying his seemingly outrageous wish to “die temporarily.”
B. Twain himself called *Tom Sawyer* a “hymn” to childhood. What is most hymn-like about the story is the way it creates another world, which it calls childhood but which is unlike the experience of real children, as an alternative to and refuge from a fallen world, the world the novel identifies with adulthood.

1. The story carefully excludes most of the life of the “poor little shabby village” in which it takes place.
2. In what it does say about the lives of adults, however, we can see the background of unfulfillment and loss against which it stages its playing children as a mode of escape.

IV. The evidence of the book’s lasting popularity is proof that readers of many ages and eras have enjoyed adventuring with Tom, but there are specific reasons why the book’s vision was so attractive to Twain and to its first popular audience, late-nineteenth-century Americans.

A. Twain wrote it between 1872 and 1875. Those were years in which the realities of his own deferred adulthood became acutely clear.

1. He became a parent for the first time at the end of 1870; by 1874, he had three children. This was also the period in which he built and moved into the gaudy, expensive, and demanding house in Hartford that mortgaged him to an extravagant lifestyle.
2. His imaginative return to the village he had been running away from since his adolescence is clearly connected to his own disaffection from adulthood.

B. Late-nineteenth-century Americans had recognizable cultural reasons for a similar nostalgia for a simpler past.

1. By the novel’s end, treasure-seeking adults have already despoiled the book’s landscape, a suggestion of how the social and economic realities of the “Gilded Age” were making Americans uncomfortable.
2. *Tom Sawyer* is only one of many popular fictions from this period set in small-town, homogenized, reassuring environments. These works all satisfied a widely shared longing for a past that could serve as an antidote for anxieties about the future.

C. The past as *Tom Sawyer* depicts it, however, is being created rather than remembered. It is a mythic, not a historical, version of America. More than Aunt Polly’s fence is being “white washed” in this novel.

Essential Reading:
Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

Supplementary Reading:
Cox, *The Fate of Humor*.
Stone, *The Innocent Eye*.

Questions to Consider:
1. Twain said *Tom Sawyer* was written for grown-ups; Howells said it was for children—which do you think was more right?
2. In *Tom Sawyer*, slavery is almost invisible, but what about the figure of “Injun Joe”? How does he haunt Tom, or the village? What happens when he dies at the end?
Lecture Twelve
The Performances of Tom Sawyer

Scope: The focus of this second lecture on The Adventures of Tom Sawyer will be more specifically on Tom himself. Looking at Tom is one of the best ways to appreciate the origins of “Mark Twain” and the nature of his popular performance. First, the lecture considers how much Tom needs to be looked at: his longing for attention, identity, and status in other people’s eyes. Next, it discusses the village as his audience and considers the means by which (in church, school, courtroom, and so on) he becomes a “glittering hero” by performing for them. That term itself suggests an issue we will consider carefully: the connection the book explores between “hero” and “fraud” or “impostor,” between being somebody in a democratic society and pretending to be somebody else. We will end by talking about the other boy in this novel—Huckleberry Finn, who almost steals the show from Tom.

Outline

I. The created character of “Mark Twain” appears in a number of books and stories (such as the travel books we discussed earlier in the course). But to understand where that character came from—how and why Samuel Clemens created and performed as “Mark Twain”—we need to look closely at two other of his characters.

A. One of them is Hank Morgan, the Connecticut Yankee who becomes a celebrity at King Arthur’s court; we will look at him a bit later in the course.

B. The other, and the one whom nearly everyone already identifies with Clemens’s actual life, is Tom Sawyer.

II. As the novel’s narrator says, “Tom was not the Model Boy of the village.” His high-spirited mischievousness is one of his most attractive features.

A. Throughout the story, he engages in various forms of misbehavior.
   1. In chapter 1, for example, he doesn’t eat the forbidden fruit, but he is caught by his aunt eating the forbidden fruit jam.
   2. Other forms of delinquency include playing hooky from school, sneaking out at night, and even running away.

B. Among Twain’s burlesque targets are the didactic stories of “Model Boys” that were a staple of children’s literature during the nineteenth century. Compared to these figures, Tom seems like a free spirit.

III. As the novel develops his adventures, however, we can see that stronger than his desire for freedom from restraint is his need for attention from other people. As the narrator says at one point, “the public eye” and “the remarks” of others about him were “food and drink” to Tom.

A. Most of his “adventures” are actually “performances,” in which the narrative keeps Tom at the center of the villagers’ attention.
   1. He even advertises the fact that he is running away—just as on the lecture tour, Twain would advertise that he was coming to town.
   2. As a runaway, Tom stays off stage just long enough to make the spectacular entrance at his own funeral.
   3. Even the treasure he discovers is “spent” to produce an effect on an audience. The emphasis of his happy ending is not that he is rich, but that he is “courted, admired, stared at.”

B. This pattern shows how closely Tom is bound to the village, how much his sense of self depends on the villagers’ responses.

C. Although they discipline Tom, the adults in the novel are actually grateful for his misbehavior. It is the most dependable source of entertainment in the village.

IV. The adjective used to describe Tom’s form of heroism is “glittering,” which raises the problem of the impostor, the figure of a false self that haunts so many of Twain’s various performances.

A. His first big public performance, his claim to be a Bible scholar in Sunday school, is unmistakably a “fraud” that shows how willing he is to deny himself in order to appear to be somebody in the eyes of others.
1. Tom himself “hates Sunday School with his whole heart.”
2. At the same time, “his entire being” longs for “the glory and eclat” that is earned by learning 2,000 Bible verses: the chance to be “great and conspicuous.”
3. For that place among the “elect,” Tom spends all the “treasure” he earned from the white-washing scene.

B. As the novel goes on, the narrative itself tries to rehabilitate this image of the hero as a fraud, providing Tom with occasions to “shine” that are virtuous as well as conspicuous.
1. He holds the courtroom’s attention when he testifies against Injun Joe but also secures justice for an innocent man.
2. His ultimate act of heroism, saving Becky from the terrors of the cave, is actually performed in the dark, where no one else can see him.

V. Twain’s desire to recuperate Tom’s need for popularity is understandable, probably even predictable. But the most astonishing development of the novel’s plot is the way it allows another character to come close to stealing the show from Tom.

A. That character is Huck Finn, whose role in the novel becomes steadily more central.
1. He is originally introduced as a minor figure, part of the novel’s cast of representative villagers.
2. By the end, his story is competing with Tom’s: according to the logic of its burlesque romance, Tom Sawyer should have ended with a scene between Tom and Becky parodying the marriage with which so many nineteenth-century novels ended. Instead, it ends with Tom trying to get Huck to conform to the village’s codes of respectability.

B. Because we have the benefit of hindsight, and know the novel Huckleberry Finn would be Twain’s masterpiece, it is fascinating to watch his imagination become more and more engaged with the possibilities of Huck’s character.

C. The most significant way in which Huck is different from Tom is that he hates attention. Thus, he offers Twain an opportunity for freedom that Tom, dependent as he is on his audience, could not provide.

Essential Reading:
Mark Twain, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer.

Supplementary Reading:
Knoper, Acting Naturally.

Questions to Consider:
1. Tom often misbehaves, but what role does his misbehaving play in the life of the adults in St. Petersburg?
2. How do you feel about Tom at the end, when he tells Huck to become respectable because “everybody does so”?
The Twain character from Roughing It is the butt of this episode with the "genuine Mexican Plug."
Reprinted from Roughing It, 1913 Harper & Bros. edition

Twain's early lecture tours often found him booked in churches, much to his dismay.
Reprinted from Life on the Mississippi, 1st ed., 1883
Twain encounters a filthy gondolier in Venice.
Reprinted from *Innocents Abroad*, 1895 American Publishing Co. edition

Twain endures his long-awaited shave by a French barber.
Reprinted from *Innocents Abroad*, 1895 American Publishing Co. edition
"If you love me, back her."

to the speaking-tube and shouted to the engineer,—

"Oh, Ben, if you love me, back her! Quick, Ben! Oh, back the immortal soul out of her!"

I heard the door close gently. I looked around, and there stood Mr. Bixby, smiling a bland, sweet smile. Then the

The Twain character in *Life on the Mississippi* learns a lesson on trusting himself the hard way, as his mentor, Mr. Bixby, looks on.

Reprinted from *Life on the Mississippi*, 1st ed., 1883
In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Tom plays two roles: that of the hero with Becky Thatcher in the cave (top), and that of the carefree showoff (bottom.)

Timeline

1835................................. Samuel Langhorne Clemens born in Florida, Missouri; Halley’s Comet visible in the sky
1839................................. Family moves to Hannibal, Missouri
1847................................. Father dies of pneumonia
1848................................. SC begins working on Hannibal paper as errand boy and printer’s devil
1852................................. “The Dandy Frightening the Squatter,” first nationally published sketch
1853................................. SC goes to St. Louis to work as a typesetter; runs away to New York City to see the World’s Fair
1855................................. SC moves to Keokuk, Iowa, to work in brother Orion’s print shop
1856................................. SC moves to Cincinnati, Ohio, to work as a typesetter
1857................................. SC becomes a “cub,” an apprentice steamboat pilot
1859................................. SC earns pilot’s license; begins work as a St. Louis–New Orleans pilot
1861................................. Civil War begins, halting Mississippi River traffic; SC serves for two weeks in an irregular Confederate unit, then travels to Nevada Territory with Orion
1863................................. SC first uses pseudonym “Mark Twain” as newspaper byline
1864................................. SC works as a reporter in San Francisco
1865................................. MT publishes “Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog” in (New York) Saturday Press; it is reprinted in papers across the nation
1866................................. SC visits the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) as traveling correspondent; MT gives first professional lecture in San Francisco, then tours California and Nevada
1867................................. The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County & Other Sketches published by Twain’s friend Charles Webb—MT later repudiates the volume; MT lectures along the Mississippi River; SC travels in Europe and the Holy Land with the Quaker City excursion
1868–1869.......................... MT gives “American Vandal Abroad” lecture tour in East and Midwest
1869................................. MT publishes Innocents Abroad; gives “Our Fellow Savages of the Sandwich Islands” lecture tour in East and Midwest
1870................................. SC marries Olivia Langdon (Livy) in Elmira, New York; couple moves to Buffalo; son Langdon born
1871................................. MT publishes Mark Twain’s Burlesque Autobiography; SC and family move to Hartford
1872................................. MT publishes Roughing It; daughter Olivia Susan (Susy) born; son dies of diphtheria
1873................................. The Gilded Age published; MT’s first novel, co-authored with Charles Dudley Warner
1873–1874.......................... MT lectures in England
1874................................. Daughter Clara Langdon born; SC and family move into “Mark Twain House” in Hartford
1875................................. MT publishes “Old Times on the Mississippi” in the Atlantic magazine
1876................................. MT publishes The Adventures of Tom Sawyer
1877 ................................................ MT gives “Whittier Birthday Dinner Speech”
1878 ................................................ SC takes family to live in Europe
1879 ................................................ SC and family return to America; MT gives toast to “The Babies” at reunion banquet of the Army of the Tennessee
1880 ................................................ MT publishes A Tramp Abroad; daughter Jean Lampton born
1881 ................................................ SC begins investing in Paige typesetting machine; MT publishes The Prince and the Pauper
1882 ................................................ SC returns to Mississippi River to collect material for a book
1883 ................................................ MT publishes Life on the Mississippi
1884 ................................................ SC creates his own publishing company, Charles L. Webster & Co.
1884–1885 ........................................ MT’s “Twins of Genius” lecture tour with George Washington Cable
1885 ................................................ MT publishes Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
1888 ................................................ Awarded honorary Master of Arts degree by Yale University
1889 ................................................ MT publishes Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
1890 ................................................ SC’s mother dies in Keokuk; SC attends funeral in Hannibal
1891 ................................................ Family shuts up Hartford house and moves to Europe
1892 ................................................ MT publishes Merry Tales and The American Claimant
1894 ................................................ Webster & Co. fails; SC declares bankruptcy; MT publishes The Tragedy of Pudd’nhead Wilson and the Comedy of Those Extraordinary Twins and Tom Sawyer Abroad
1895–1896 ....................................... MT’s “Around the World” lecture tour, across northwestern United States, Australia, New Zealand, India, and South Africa
1896 ................................................ MT publishes Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc and Tom Sawyer, Detective; Susy dies of spinal meningitis
1897 ................................................ MT publishes Following the Equator
1898 ................................................ SC finishes repaying his creditors in full; begins writing autobiography
1899 ................................................ MT publishes “The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg”
1900 ................................................ Family returns to America and moves to New York City
1901 ................................................ MT publishes “To the Person Sitting in Darkness”; family moves to Riverdale, New York; MT receives honorary Doctorate of Letters from Yale University
1902 ................................................ MT receives honorary Doctorate of Laws from the University of Missouri and SC returns to Hannibal and the river for the last time
1903 ................................................ Family moves to Tarrytown, New York; then sails for Italy
1904 ................................................ MT begins autobiographical dictations; Livy dies at Florence; SC moves to New York City
1905 ................................................ MT gives speech at his “Seventieth Birthday Dinner”
1906–1907 ....................................... MT publishes twenty-five installments of his autobiography in the North American Review; publishes What Is Man? anonymously in a private edition; first wears white suit in winter when testifying in Congress for an international copyright law
1907................................................ MT publishes Christian Science; receives honorary Litt.D. from Oxford University

1908................................................ SC moves to Redding, Connecticut; forms “The Mark Twain Company” and trademarks his pseudonym

1909................................................ MT publishes Is Shakespeare Dead?; Jean dies of heart failure

1910................................................ Samuel Clemens dies in Redding, Connecticut; Halley’s Comet again visible in the sky
Glossary

**burlesque**: a comic literary technique in which the characteristics of another text or kind of text are imitated and exaggerated in order to deflate and mock the original.

**deadpan**: describes a performance technique in which the speaker’s physical expression remains at odds with the effect his or her words produce on the audience, keeping a straight face, for example, while listeners laugh; it is a live equivalent to some forms of irony.

**determinism**: the philosophical belief that there is no free will, that an individual’s life is entirely the product of various forces beyond his or her control.

**Gilded Age**: the title of Twain’s first full-length fiction (co-authored with Charles Dudley Warner), this term has been appropriated by American historians to describe the decades after the Civil War as a time of pervasive political corruption and economic speculation.

**ideology**: the usually unspoken and unconscious set of values and assumptions by which people in a given society organize and explain reality; Mark Twain referred to this process with the terms “training” and “inherited ideas.”

**irony**: classical rhetoricians distinguish several varieties of irony, but in relation to Mark Twain’s work, the concept most significantly refers to a latent or unspoken meaning in a set of words, a meaning that often contradicts the overt one.

**lyceum system**: a nineteenth-century phenomenon, with clear origins in New England’s habit of listening to sermons and its faith in moral uplift and self-improvement: it brought nationally recruited speakers to city and small-town audiences for lectures on a wide range of topics, from foreign travel to history to reform causes such as temperance.

**parody**: a comic or literary technique closely related to **burlesque**; when a burlesque humorously imitates another writer’s or work’s specific style, it is more often referred to as a parody.

**realism**: the commitment in art to represent life as it actually is lived, unmediated by literary conventions like “hero” and “villain”; in American literature, the term typically refers to the generation of writers that included Mark Twain.

**romance**: in literary criticism, and to a realist like Mark Twain, romance is a mode of writing that idealizes life; Hawthorne defended his right to write romances, whereas to Twain, it was a term of reproach and a subject of much deflationary humor.

**satire**: the use of humor, irony, or exaggeration to arouse indignation at specific ideas, people, institutions, or human nature in general.

**subscription publication**: a mode of selling books through the agency of door-to-door sales, in which subscribers promised to buy a book in advance of its publication on the basis of a sample or prospectus of the book’s contents; the system was widespread in the late nineteenth century, but Mark Twain was the only American author of any renown to use it.

**vernacular**: in literary criticism, this term refers to language derived from ordinary speech and common experience, as opposed to language acquired from other books.
Biographical Notes

“Artemus Ward” (pseudonym of Charles F. Browne, 1834–1867). The best-known American humorist during the 1860s. His comic lectures and travel writings were models for Mark Twain, whom he met and befriended in the Nevada Territory in 1863.

Bixby, Horace (1826–1912). The Mississippi River pilot who, in 1857, took Sam Clemens on as an apprentice, or cub. He is described with great respect as the “lightning pilot” Mr. B---- in “Old Times on the Mississippi” (1875).

Bliss, Elisha (1822–1880). The head of the American Publishing Company, Bliss wrote Mark Twain in 1867 to ask if he was interested in turning his Quaker City newspaper letters into a book. Bliss went on to publish and sell by subscription Twain’s first six major works (1869–1880). Believing Bliss had been defrauding him, Twain broke away from his company in 1880—but after his own publishing company failed, the American Publishing Company, now headed by Bliss’s son Frank, published Twain’s major works during the 1890s.

Cable, George Washington (1844–1925). Regional southern writer and novelist, Cable toured and lectured with Mark Twain in 1884–1885 as one of the “Twins of Genius.” Devoutly Christian and an outspoken critic of the white South’s treatment of freed slaves, Cable both impressed and infuriated the easier-going Twain.

Clemens, Olivia Langdon (1845–1902). The only daughter of Jervis and Olivia Lewis Langdon of Elmira, New York, Livy married Mark Twain in 1870. When Twain went bankrupt in 1894, by sophisticated legal maneuvering, she became his “chief creditor”; throughout the thirty-two years of their marriage, Twain felt deeply indebted to her as a friend and helpmeet.

Clemens, Olivia Susan (1872–1896). Sam and Livy called their oldest child Susy. Her death in Hartford while they were on the “Around the World” lecture tour opened a wound in the family that never healed.

Clemens, Orion (1825–1897). Sam’s older brother whose life story, according to Sam, should have been titled “Autobiography of a Damned Fool.” He played an important role in “Mark Twain’s” career as the person who brought Sam into a print shop and the newspaper business and who took Sam with him to Nevada, but Orion himself failed at a long list of jobs.

Fairbanks, Mary (1828–1898). A fellow traveler on the Quaker City trip, “Mother” Fairbanks (as Twain called her in letters he signed as “Your Prodigal Son”) helped coach Twain at the beginning of his career in how to appeal to a national audience.

Howells, William Dean (1837–1920). A prolific novelist, a prominent editor, and late-nineteenth-century America’s leading advocate for literary realism, Howells met Twain in 1869 after having written a favorable review of Innocents Abroad. For the rest of Twain’s life, Howells served him as a generous friend and advisor.

James, Henry (1843–1916). The “other great writer” of Mark Twain’s generation, James was best known is his time as the author of “Daisy Miller,” and is best known in American literary history for his subtle, ironic, and complex narratives of consciousness confronting reality. He and Twain had many themes in common; stylistically, they were worlds apart.

Mallory, Thomas (1400?–1471). The British knight whose collection of prose tales, Le Morte D’Arthur, largely defined the myth of Camelot and the Round Table for five hundred years.

Paige, James W. Originally from upstate New York, Paige was the inventor who convinced Mark Twain to invest hundreds of thousands of dollars between 1880 and 1894 in his ingenious but finicky and ultimately unmarketable typesetting machine.

Prime, William (1825–1905). The travel writer who published Tent Life in the Holy Land in 1857; in Innocents Abroad, Twain refers to him as “Grimes” and quotes his book as an example of the romanticizing of which most travel writing is guilty.

Rogers, Henry Huddleston (1840–1909). To Twain, whom he helped out of debt and back to prosperity in the 1890s, Rogers was “the best man I have ever known.” To others, who knew him as the Director of Standard Oil, he was one of the “robber barons” of the Gilded Age.
**Scott, Walter** (1771–1832). As a poet and novelist, he was perhaps the most popular English writer through the nineteenth century. According to Mark Twain, however, who describes the “Sir Walter disease” as an acute susceptibility to the illusions of romance, Scott’s books may have been responsible for the Civil War.

**Warner, Charles Dudley** (1829–1900). A Hartford newspaper publisher and editor whom Twain met as a neighbor in the Nook Farm community and with whom, on a dare from their wives, he collaborated on *The Gilded Age* (1873), Twain’s first novel.

**Webster, Charles** (1851–1891). He married Mark Twain’s niece in 1875 and became Twain’s business agent in 1881. From 1882 to 1888, he headed the publishing company Twain founded. The company had Webster’s name on it, but Twain remained in control.

**Whittier, John Greenleaf** (1807–1892). Although an abolitionist long before that was a popular position, by 1877, when Twain spoke at his seventieth birthday dinner, Whittier was one of the nation’s most widely read and deeply respected writers.
Bibliography

Essential Readings: Mark Twain’s Texts

I recommend the following editions for the specific Twain works we focus on in the lectures.

For almost all the short works we discuss (tales, sketches, speeches, and so on), the single best source is Mark Twain: Collected Tales, Sketches, Speeches and Essays, 2 volumes, ed. Louis J. Budd, New York: The Library of America, 1992.

The Library of America has also published Innocents Abroad and Roughing It and Mississippi Writings: Tom Sawyer, Life on the Mississippi, Huckleberry Finn and Pudd’nhead Wilson, both edited by Guy Cardwell. These are reliable editions, but most readers will probably prefer to read Twain’s full-length works in separate books. For them, I recommend getting Innocents Abroad and Pudd’nhead Wilson as published in The Oxford Mark Twain series. This is a collected twenty-six-volume set of Twain’s works, published for the general reader by the Oxford University Press, 1996–1997, under the general editorship of Shelley Fisher Fishkin. The volumes closely follow the texts originally published in Twain’s time and have the great virtue of including the original illustrations.

For the other full-length texts—Roughing It, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, and A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court—I recommend the paperback editions published by the Mark Twain Project under the imprint of the Mark Twain Library (Berkeley: University of California Press). These volumes are handsomely printed and reasonably priced and include not only the original illustrations, but also much of the scholarly annotations prepared by the project’s contributing editors for the ongoing “The Works of Mark Twain” series.

The University of California Press and the Mark Twain Project also publish the best sources for Twain’s late unfinished and unpublished texts, including The Devil’s Race-Track: Mark Twain’s Great Dark Writings, ed. John S. Tuckey (1966), a well-chosen sampling of the stories we discuss in Lecture Twenty-Three, and Mark Twain: The Mysterious Stranger, ed. William M. Gibson (1970), bringing together all three of the surviving unfinished manuscripts in which, between 1897 and 1908, Twain tried to tell the story of a divine-demonic figure who falls to earth.

As part of its commitment to publishing scholarly editions of the entire mass of written material Mark Twain left us, the Mark Twain Project has to date brought out five extremely well annotated and illustrated (but also expensive) volumes of his voluminous correspondence under the title Mark Twain’s Letters. Until this series is complete, you can find many additional letters in six older collections, each organized according to his correspondent: Mark Twain to Mrs. Fairbanks, ed. Dixon Wecter (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1949); Mark Twain’s Letters to His Publishers, 1867–1894, ed. Hamlin Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press); The Love Letters of Mark Twain (letters to Olivia), ed. Dixon Wecter (New York: Harper, 1949); Selected Mark Twain-Howells Letters, eds. Anderson, Gibson, and Smith (New York: Atheneum, 1960); Mark Twain’s Correspondence with Henry Huddleston Rogers, ed. Lewis Leary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961); and Mark Twain’s Aquarium: The Samuel Clemens Angelfish Correspondence, 1905–1910, ed. John Cooley (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991).

For students especially interested in Twain’s live performances, from the full-length lectures to his brief after-dinner toasts, the best source is Mark Twain Speaking, ed. Paul Fatout (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1976).

Supplementary Materials: Internet Resources

Although much that is available through the World Wide Web is unreliable, the number of responsibly prepared and permanently archived resources for students and teachers is steadily growing. The following four sites devoted to Twain are the richest and most useful.

“Mark Twain in His Times: An Electronic Archive,” written and directed by Stephen Railton, http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/railton. This is my own site, and it is the location of the “Internet Resources” listed throughout the lectures.

“Mark Twain Quotations, Newspaper Collections, & Related Resources,” by Barbara Schmidt, http://www.twainquotes.com. A great place to look up what Twain said in his often-quoted and -misquoted aphorisms, as well as what he wrote in his newspaper days and what was written about him during his lifetime in the New York Times. The site also includes a wonderful collection of pictures of Twain.

©2002 The Teaching Company Limited Partnership
“Mark Twain,” by Jim Zwick, http://www.boondocketsnet.com/twainwww. The first major Twain site on-line, and still continuously updated and enlarged, this contains a wide range of materials, from Twain texts to teaching lessons.

“The Mark Twain Papers and Project,” maintained by the Mark Twain Project at the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, http://library.berkeley.edu/BANC/MTP. Includes online exhibits from the wealth of Twain material in its collections.

**Supplementary Readings: Selected Criticism**

The texts below marked with an asterisk (*) may be hard to find outside libraries, but they are the best places to look to see how “Mark Twain” was defined and redefined during the first half century after his death.

Arac, Jonathan. “Huckleberry Finn” as Idol and Target. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997. A usually thoughtful, occasionally polemic meditation on the role Twain’s novel has played and should play in our culture, especially in our classrooms.


Benson, Ivan. *Mark Twain’s Western Years, Together with Hitherto Unreprinted Clemens Items*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1938. Focuses on how Clemens grew as a writer and includes a good sampling of Mark Twain’s Nevada and California newspaper pieces.


*Brooks, Van Wyck. The Ordeal of Mark Twain. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1920. This book dominated the discussion of Twain for about thirty years; it argues that he was a great writer crippled by America’s inferior culture.*


———. *Mark Twain: Social Philosopher*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1962. Looks at Twain’s ideas about society, politics, and history as they developed over the course of his career.


Chadwick-Joshua, Jocelyn. *The Jim Dilemma: Reading Race in Huckleberry Finn*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1998. Addresses the most significant modern concerns raised by the question of teaching Twain’s novel by careful readings of Jim’s representation in the text.


Doyno, Victor A. *Writing “Huck Finn”: Mark Twain’s Creative Process*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991. By a series of close analyses of the portions of the manuscript that were known to exist in 1991, Doyno allows us to watch as Twain’s imagination shaped his story into art.


Ensor, Allison. *Mark Twain and the Bible*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1969. Considers the Bible as the book that exerted the most influence on Twain’s imagination, focusing particularly on the beginning and end of his career.


Fulton, Joe B. *Mark Twain’s Ethical Realism: The Aesthetics of Race, Class and Gender*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997. Through close readings of four novels, this study argues for the moral significance of Twain’s realistic depictions of social differences.


Gillman, Susan. *Dark Twins: Imposture and Identity in Mark Twain’s America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989. Uses the complex relationship between Samuel Clemens and Mark Twain as a starting point for examining Twain’s fascination with various forms of identity—fraudulent, racial, gendered, and so on.


Gribben, Alan. *Mark Twain’s Library: A Reconstruction*. 2 vols. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1980. This well-researched study reveals how much Twain read and how important his reading was to his thought and writing.

Harris, Susan K. *The Courtship of Olivia Langdon and Mark Twain*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Through an analysis of the letters Twain and Livy wrote each other, Harris examines the cultural dynamics of their relationship.

———. *Mark Twain’s Escape from Time: A Study of Patterns and Images*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1982. A reading of how Twain sought to create locations in space and in time (water and childhood, for example) as imaginative escapes from the pressure of reality.

©2002 The Teaching Company Limited Partnership


Howells, William Dean. *My Mark Twain: Reminiscences and Criticisms*. New York: Harper, 1910. Reviews of Twain’s books and an essay on his personality by the literary man whose opinion meant the most to Twain himself.

Kaplan, Justin. *Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966. This Pulitzer Prize-winning book is the best biography of Twain, although it begins when his subject is already thirty years old.


LeMaster, J. R., and James D. Wilson, eds. *The Mark Twain Encyclopedia*. New York: Garland, 1993. With entries on a wide range of people, books, and topics by a distinguished company of Twain scholars, this is a good place to start looking for thoughtful answers to basic questions about Twain.


Lorch, Fred W. *The Trouble Begins at Eight: Mark Twain’s Lecture Tours*. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1968. A scholarly study of where Twain lectured, what he said from the platform, how he said it, and how it was received; includes reconstructions of the texts of his major lectures.


*Lynn, Kenneth S. Mark Twain and Southwest Humor*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1959. Analyzes Twain’s humorous techniques, especially his use of narrative innocence, in the context of the antebellum humorists Clemens read.

Macnaughton, William R. *Mark Twain’s Last Years as a Writer*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1979. This study deliberately avoids using the words “despair” and “obsession” while offering a critical account of Twain’s late, unfinished manuscripts.


Messent, Peter. *The Short Works of Mark Twain: A Critical Study*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001. Messent takes up a neglected topic: the collections of tales and sketches Twain published; with such titles as *Sketches, Old and New* and *Merry Tales*, these books formed a major part of his literary output.

Michelson, Bruce. *Mark Twain on the Loose: A Comic Writer and the American Self*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995. Self-labeled as an “anti-reading of Mark Twain,” this book embraces the signs of anarchy and evasiveness that can help explain why Twain has been such a “hard-to-get-rid-of” image of our national culture.
Paine, Albert Bigelow. *Mark Twain: A Biography*, 3 volumes. New York: Harper, 1912. Twain made Paine his authorized biographer, Boswell to his Johnson, and in return, Paine carefully preserved the myth of Twain as all-American hero. But his closeness to Twain during the last years of his life gives this book an authority no other biographer can claim.

Petit, Arthur G. *Mark Twain and the South*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1974. One of the few studies of a strangely neglected topic, this explores how Twain’s ideas about region and race were shaped and reshaped during his life.


———. “The Tragedy of Mark Twain, by Pudd’nhead Wilson.” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 56 (2002). Compares the story Twain tells about David Wilson’s rise to popularity with the drama of Twain’s performance for his audience.

Rasmussen, R. Kent. *Mark Twain A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Life and Writings*. New York: Facts on File, 1995. Contains more entries than *The Mark Twain Encyclopedia* and sticks closer to names, dates, and facts; it also includes chapter-by-chapter summaries of many of Twain’s works.


Robinson, Forrest G. *In Bad Faith: The Dynamics of Deception in Mark Twain’s America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986. A perceptive account of the relationship between Twain’s fictions and the “fictions” of American culture, focusing on *Tom Sawyer* and *Huck Finn*.


Sanborn, Margaret. *Mark Twain: The Bachelor Years*. New York: Doubleday, 1990. A popular study of Twain’s experiences along the river and in the west.


*Smith, Henry Nash. *Mark Twain: The Development of a Writer*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962. Smith says his focus is on “the problems of style and structure,” but he treats that and a good deal more in this incisive series of analyses.


©2002 The Teaching Company Limited Partnership
Steinbrink, Jeffrey. *Getting to Be Mark Twain*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991. A biographical and literary study of the years 1868 to 1871, during which Clemens wrote the first two “Mark Twain” books and, Steinbrink argues, established the shape of the “Mark Twain” identity.


 Wonham, Henry B. *Mark Twain and the Art of the Tall Tale*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. Traces the history of the tall tale as both rhetorical and cultural performance and looks at how Twain appropriated and revised the conventions of the genre.
The Life and Work of Mark Twain
Part II
Professor Stephen Railton

THE TEACHING COMPANY ®
Stephen Railton, Ph.D.
Professor of English, University of Virginia

In his career as one of the most popular professors at the University of Virginia, Stephen Railton has taught more than 5,000 students, always with the same enthusiasm for American literature as a subject and the classroom as a site of intellectual challenge and growth. He came to Virginia from Columbia University, where he received his B.A. in 1970, his M.A. in 1971, and his Ph.D. in 1975.

Dr. Railton has published numerous articles on American writers from Poe to Steinbeck, including, of course, Mark Twain. Among his books are *Fenimore Cooper: A Study of His Imagination* and *Authorship and Audience: Literary Performance in the American Renaissance* (both published by the University of Princeton Press). He is currently working on two books about Mark Twain, *Mark Twain: A Brief Introduction* (forthcoming from Blackwell Press) and *Being Somebody: Samuel Clemens’ Career as Mark Twain*.

Dr. Railton has also created two award-winning Web-based electronic archives, intended to explore the uses of electronic technology for teaching and studying American literature—*Uncle Tom’s Cabin & American Culture* (http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/utc) and *Mark Twain in His Times* (http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/railton). These sites are ongoing projects. In the five years they have been on-line, more than two million users have visited them.
# Table of Contents

The Life and Work of Mark Twain
Part II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professor Biography</td>
<td></td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Scope</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture Thirteen</td>
<td><em>Huck Finn</em> I: Defining an American Voice</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture Fourteen</td>
<td><em>Huck Finn</em> II: The Quest for Freedom</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture Fifteen</td>
<td><em>Huck Finn</em> III: The Great American Novel?</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture Sixteen</td>
<td><em>Huck Finn</em> IV: Classrooms and Controversy</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture Seventeen</td>
<td><em>Connecticut Yankee</em> I: Unwriting the Middle Ages</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture Eighteen</td>
<td><em>Connecticut Yankee</em> II: Revisiting the Nineteenth Century</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture Nineteen</td>
<td><em>Connecticut Yankee</em> III: The Quest for Status</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture Twenty</td>
<td><em>Pudd’nhead Wilson</em>: Fictions of Law and Custom</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture Twenty-One</td>
<td>Anti-Imperialist Works</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture Twenty-Two</td>
<td>Late Twain in Public</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture Twenty-Three</td>
<td>Late Twain in Private</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture Twenty-Four</td>
<td>Sam Clemens Is Dead/Long Live Mark Twain</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrations</td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeline</td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glossary</td>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biographical Notes</td>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td></td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Life and Work of Mark Twain

Scope:
To William Dean Howells, he was “the Lincoln of our literature.” To Ernest Hemingway, he was the father of “all modern American literature.” For generations of Americans, his image has been as familiar as the most recent pop celebrities. In this course, we will explore Mark Twain as both one of our classic authors and as an almost mythic presence in our cultural life as a nation.

A main goal will be to appreciate the achievement of his best, most representative works. Fourteen of the course’s twenty-four lectures will focus on seven specific major texts: 

*Innocents Abroad*, his first and, in his time, most popular book (Lectures Five and Six); 
*Roughing It*, the narrative of his misadventures in the West (Lecture Seven); 
“Old Times on the Mississippi,” his thoroughly satisfying account of learning to be a riverboat pilot (Lecture Ten); 
*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, his first novel about the world he grew up in and a permanent contribution to the world’s literature about childhood (Lectures Eleven and Twelve); 
*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, a text that has been both repeatedly banned and, at the same time, nominated for the title Great American Novel (Lectures Thirteen through Sixteen); 
*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, Twain’s serio-comic fantasy in which the Old World collides with the New (Lectures Seventeen through Nineteen); and 
*The Tragedy of Pudd’nhead Wilson*, Twain’s last published novel about the slave-holding village world of his childhood (Lecture Twenty). There are also separate lectures on major elements of his imaginative life: humor and entertainment (Lecture Three), as well as satire and political protest (Lecture Twenty-One).

Throughout the course, we will also locate these works in the contexts of Samuel Clemens’s life and Mark Twain’s career, as well as the cultural times in which they were written. Lecture Two provides an overview of his dramatically eventful biography. Lecture Four explains how his books were published and marketed. Two other lectures cover Twain’s ambitions and achievements (and one conspicuous flop) as a stand-up performer in front of live audiences: as itinerant lecturer (Lecture Eight) and as after-dinner speaker (Lecture Nine). The final three lectures use the last decade of his career to investigate the complex and often contradictory meanings of his story as cultural hero and private human being. Lecture Twenty-Two focuses on his apotheosis as one of the best-known and most deeply loved American selves through the series of public triumphs that marked the end of his life. Lecture Twenty-Three looks behind that white-suited figure at the alienated, embittered man few of his contemporaries imagined existed and at some of the dozens of unfinished, unpublished texts in which he tried to make sense of his spectacular career. Lecture Twenty-Four considers Mark Twain’s significance for twentieth-century America and beyond.

Throughout the course, we will undertake to discover what Mark Twain and America say about each other. For access to what he said, we will use a wide range of his texts, from the most familiar to ones that still remain known mainly to Twain scholars. To appreciate the meaning his works and image had for America, we will take account of contemporary reviews, articles, and obituaries. We will look at both what the image of “Mark Twain” has stood for and what it masks.
Lecture Thirteen

_Huck Finn, I: Defining an American Voice_

**Scope:** As the first of four lectures on _Huck Finn_, this one begins by considering the conflicted nature of the novel’s reputation: it has always been both Twain’s most popular novel and his most frequently attacked one. We begin with why it was condemned in 1885: Huck’s character and language. Although some critics felt threatened by Huck, Twain was excited to let Huck to tell this story in his own voice. We will discuss the value of Huck’s language to an American writer anxious to liberate writing from British conventions and books. In addition, we will see how Huck’s language also serves the goals of a realist writer trying to show readers what really exists. We will link this up to the theme of travel in Twain and the conflict between personal experience and cultural authority. The lecture ends by applying this idea to Huck’s struggle to see Jim, whom his culture considers a slave and, thus, a piece of property, as a person.

**Outline**

I. Mark Twain’s eighth book, _Adventures of Huckleberry Finn_, has always been his most conflicted achievement.  
   A. It took him longer to write than any other of his books. Huck acknowledges its eight-year gestation at the end when he says, “if I’d a knowed what a trouble it was to make a book I wouldn’t a tackled it.”  
   B. The book has always been popular with readers. It was, for example, Twain’s best-selling novel during his lifetime.  
   C. But it has also always been in trouble with critics.  
      1. In our time, it has been widely condemned and often banned because of its representation of African Americans. We will spend four lectures on the novel, and in the fourth one, we will talk directly about that charge.  
      2. It was first banned within a month after it was published in 1885, when the Concord Library Committee pulled it off the shelf. Their objections were based on Huck himself: his character struck them as bad and, just as important, so did his language.

II. That objection points out one way in which Twain’s eighth book was innovative: his invention of a new first-person narrative point of view. We can start to appreciate the novel’s meaning and achievement by considering how Twain uses Huck’s character and his voice.  
   A. By comparing Huck’s voice to the language of Emmeline Grangerford’s poem (in chapter 17), we can see how Huck’s illiteracy is actually a kind of freedom.  
      1. Her diction is conventionally literary, derived from other books.  
      2. His language is authentic, derived from his own experience. Emmeline would say “alabaster” white, for example, whereas Huck, in chapter 5, calls his Pap’s face “a tree-toad white, a fish-belly white.”
   B. The books Huck hasn’t read and, thus, the language he doesn’t know how to speak are imported from Europe, especially England—like the romances that Tom Sawyer always refers to as his “authorities.”  
      1. Before _Huck Finn_, there was a gap in most American fiction between colloquial American speech and each narrator’s formal literary voice, between American subjects and British linguistic conventions.  
      2. By turning the narrative of this novel over to Huck’s unmistakably colloquial voice, Twain is doing for American prose much the same thing that Whitman did earlier for American poetry: empowering American literature to re-create American experience on its own terms.

III. At the same time that letting Huck tell the story advances the cause of American literature, it also serves Twain’s goals as a literary realist.  
   A. The style of _Huck Finn_ allows Twain to go back to the world he had grown up in, which he had described through a more conventional third-person voice in _Tom Sawyer_, and get a lot closer to it. Again, compared to Emmeline’s poem, the greatest strength of Huck’s voice is the way it stays in immediate contact with reality.  
      1. Her poem privileges a world that no one can see—“the realm of the good and the great.”  
      2. As a cultural “illiterate,” Huck has not learned about the world that such characters as Emmeline believe in. Just as we see him trying to write like Emmeline, we see him trying to read Bunyan’s
allegorical Pilgrim’s Progress, but because he has not read the book Bunyan’s work relies on—the Bible—he cannot understand it.

B. Instead of deferring to books as “authorities,” Huck tests their claims against his own experience. At the beginning and end of chapter 3, for example, when he experiments to see if both prayer and rubbing a lamp will work, he is holding the world described in books (the Bible and The 1001 Arabian Nights) up against what he can see with his own eyes.

C. Thus, Twain can use Huck as a point of view from which to challenge and rewrite romances. We can compare the “robber gang” that Tom organizes in the beginning, for instance, with the real robbers whom Huck encounters in chapter 12.

IV. Twain is just as interested in the fictions of Huck’s culture as in the imported fictions it read. Chief among these is the cultural belief that slavery is right. It is because Huck starts largely outside the “regular” conventions of society, and relies chiefly on his own experience, that he can see Jim.

A. To every other character, Jim is defined by the abstractions that underlie slavery: he is property that can be bought and sold.

B. Huck’s representation of Jim is conflicted, as we will later discuss in detail. But in the novel’s middle sections, in its account of the journey Huck and Jim take together on the raft, there are moments when we can see Jim as the human being he really is.

1. The most memorable example of this kind of seeing is the scene in chapter 15 when, after the two have been separated by a dense fog, Huck tries to play a trick on Jim. We need to look closely at that passage, hear exactly what both Huck and Jim are saying here, because of all Twain is using their voices to say about friendship, equality, and human dignity—and the crucial role words play in defining reality.

2. At the same time, we have to note that even here Huck uses the word that rightly disturbs so many critics today, the word “nigger.” That raises the issue we will address in the next lecture: slavery and freedom.

Essential Reading:
Mark Twain, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.

Supplementary Reading:
Blair, Mark Twain and Huckleberry Finn.
Smith, Development of a Writer, chapter 6.

Questions to Consider:
1. Is Huckleberry Finn, though itself a book, a critique of books? Can it be considered as making a case for some form of “illiteracy”?

2. How is Huck’s voice different from the others we hear people speaking in the novel? What do their habits of speech, their vocabularies, and so on say about them?
Lecture Fourteen

*Huck Finn,* II: The Quest for Freedom

**Scope:** The lecture begins by comparing Twain’s first two accounts of the landscape of his childhood: *Huck Finn* addresses the fact of antebellum slavery much more directly than *Tom Sawyer* does. The lecture goes on, however, to consider the book as a dramatization of a form of enslavement that survived emancipation: what Twain later called “training,” or what could be called mental slavery. As a story about social or ideological conditioning, *Huck Finn* is less about whether Huck can help Jim in his flight toward freedom than about whether Jim can help Huck free himself from the values a morally corrupt society has taught him. The lecture traces this quest for mental freedom as the novel develops it through the journey that takes place not only on, but also down the Mississippi River. In the lecture’s conclusion, we consider whether Twain’s book suggests that such freedom is possible by taking up the question of whether Huck changes or grows during his story.

**Outline**

I. One of the books Twain is using Huck’s voice to challenge or *un/write* is *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, his own first book about the antebellum society he grew up in.

A. *Huck Finn* is anti-nostalgic. Huck himself is, for most of the novel, in flight from the village that readers of *Tom Sawyer* long to return to, and through Huck’s eyes, we see much more violence, cruelty, hypocrisy, and greed.

B. Slavery is a much more conspicuous fact of social life.
   1. There is a slave named Jim in *Tom Sawyer*, but he is a much different character: a boy at the periphery of the story.
   2. *Huck Finn* puts its Jim, a grown man looking for freedom, right at the center of its story.

II. Although the novel’s overt plot concerns whether Huck can help Jim escape from the social institution of slavery, its deeper theme revolves around the question of whether Jim can help Huck escape from the way he, too, is enslaved.

A. How is Huck enslaved? One of the traits this novel shares with other realist novels is its conception of character as something shaped by the social environment. Twain would later call this process “training” and argue that it is “all there is to a man.”
   1. Huck sees slavery in the way his society does: as right, as approved by God.
   2. He assumes a lot about African Americans, again because of the way he has been conditioned by his society’s prejudices.
   3. Even his self-image is the one he has been given by his society: he sees himself as bad, “low-down,” and “ornery,” even though he is a good kid.

B. As we read Huck’s account, we have to appreciate it as an unreliable or ironic narrative.
   1. At the simplest level, for example, he *admires* Emmeline’s poetry.
   2. At a more sophisticated level, he never realizes the humor in his account; he never even gets the jokes he makes.
   3. At the deepest level of all, he never understands the story he is telling. Although America had abolished slavery by the time Twain started writing the book, Huck believes it is an eternal truth, and from first to last, he believes he is wrong to help Jim escape.

III. In a journal entry written about ten years after publishing *Huck Finn*, Twain called it “a book of mine in which a sound heart and a deformed conscience come into collision.” This is his way of summing up the novel’s most significant conflict: between what Huck has been taught or trained to think and what he learns from his own experience and feelings.

A. To appreciate the power of this conflict, we need to look closely at the scene in chapter 31 that most critics call the book’s dramatic climax. It occurs after the King and Duke have sold Jim, and Huck must try to decide what to do.
1. The scene redefines “conscience” from a realist’s perspective, as the voice of society and not the voice of God.

2. In the scene we see two very different “Jims”—the “nigger” and slave that society defines him as and the friend whom Huck has gotten to know on the journey down the river.

B. The scene concludes with one of the most resonant ironies in all of American literature, when Huck decides to “go to hell” to help Jim to freedom. It is a heroic choice, but it leaves open the question of whether Huck is any closer to freedom himself.

IV. Freedom for Jim would mean reaching the free states. Freedom for Huck, on the other hand, would depend on reaching a new state of mind: seeing how his prejudices and beliefs are false. In his 1895 journal entry about Huck Finn, Twain also says that in it, Huck’s deformed conscience “suffers defeat,” which suggests that by the end he is free. Can we agree?

A. It’s not clear that at the end, Huck is any further along than the ideological point from which he began.
   1. When he decides to “go to hell,” he leaves slavery as divinely sanctioned.
   2. When he decides to “steal” Jim out of slavery, he even leaves intact the essential “deformity” on which slavery rested: that human beings can be property.

B. In the novel’s famous concluding paragraph, Huck seems to reject society and “sivilization” to “light out for the Territory,” but even this leaves the question of freedom unresolved.
   1. In this ending, Twain seems to both perpetuate and challenge the Romantic idea of the self as superior to society and nature as a means to emancipation.
   2. Twain allows us to hope that by escaping West, Huck will find freedom; at the same time, Twain suggests that because Huck will carry the voice and values of his society with him wherever he goes, that idea of escape is an illusion.

C. The traveling that Huck and Jim do in the novel can be read in two different ways. On the raft on the river, they are outside the structures of society. On the raft, however, they are also going down the river—which is the fate Jim was running away from at the start.

Essential Reading:
Mark Twain, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.

Supplementary Reading:
Budd, ed., New Essays on “Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.”

Questions to Consider:
1. Do you think Huck grows or changes in the course of the story? If so, in what specific ways?
2. Mark Twain actually started a sequel to Huck, about his adventures with Tom in the Territory he says he is lighting out for, though it was never finished and not published until almost a century after the novel. What are your own ideas about what Huck will do or become if he does succeed in running away from Aunt Sally?
Lecture Fifteen

_Huck Finn, III: The Great American Novel?

**Scope:** This lecture begins with Hemingway’s assertion that “all modern American literature” comes from _Huck Finn_. Building on the first two lectures, we discuss the novel’s “modern” aspects, especially its ironic structure. In the discussion of its “American” aspects, we first reconsider Huck’s voice, then go on to examine Twain’s apparently democratic decision to give narrative authority and moral superiority to Huck and Jim, who would have been considered socially inferior to just about everyone else in the text. This leads to the still larger question of how the novel depicts American society and such democratic ideals as “the people.” We will end by considering the novel’s achievement in balancing humor and tragedy: Huck and Jim’s failures to gain the freedom they were questing for with the possibility of progress and enlightenment, and Twain’s growing pessimism about mankind with faith in individual goodness. The novel’s deeply conflicted character is perhaps the best sign of its power to continue to delight, appall, and transform its readers.

**Outline**

I. Twain’s contemporary readers enjoyed _Huck Finn_ as an entertaining novel, but in the twentieth century, many writers and critics came to regard it as one of the classics of American literature.

A. The most famous of the claims for its greatness is probably Hemingway’s assertion, made in 1935, that “all modern American literature comes from _Huckleberry Finn_.” Although no generalization that big can be true, we can appreciate why Hemingway would say that.

   1. He may have been trying to disguise his own indebtedness to the fictions of Henry James, especially the international tales we discussed earlier.

   2. By “American,” Hemingway was probably thinking of what we discussed in the first _Huck Finn_ lecture: Huck’s voice and the way it liberated the language out of which an American writer could make a novel.

   3. By “modern,” he was probably thinking of what we talked about in the last lecture: the ironic way in which Twain manipulates that voice.

B. Although Hemingway’s emphasis was on the novel’s art and what it reveals about creating American literature, others have celebrated the novel for what it expresses about the values of American culture.

C. A memorable example of that comes from Charles Kuralt, the well-known television journalist, who said that if he was asked to say as much as possible about America as briefly as possible, he would only need to say two words: Huckleberry Finn.

II. The odyssey of Huck and Jim down the middle of the country on the nation’s greatest river allows Twain to connect with many central aspects of the American experience, the ideals that underlie it, and the realities that often conflict with those ideals. As important as the issue of freedom is to the novel is the way it tests the democratic principle of equality.

A. As Huck and Jim’s story, it is an eloquent tribute to that principle.

B. “Travel,” Twain wrote in _Innocents Abroad_, “is fatal to prejudice.” As Huck and Jim travel together on the raft, Huck does seem to “unlearn” some of his prejudices about blacks.

C. Huck has already described himself as “lighting out” on the first page of the novel.

   1. In _Tom Sawyer_, we see how Huck, as the son of the town drunk, is consigned by society to the bottom of the social order.

   2. Throughout _Huck Finn_, we see how Jim, as a black slave, is considered even further down on the social hierarchy.

D. Part of the imaginative move Twain makes between _Tom Sawyer_ and _Huck Finn_ is to relocate the narrative point of view and, thus, the reader’s sympathies, within that supposedly “inferior” space.

   1. One thematic role the King and the Duke play as characters is to expose the absurdity of an aristocratic social order.
2. By such comparisons, the novel becomes a tribute to the democratic nobility of the poor white and the black slave and the fellowship of common humanity they create on the raft.

III. Yet the novel’s attitude toward democracy is deeply ambivalent.
   A. Colonel Sherburn’s speech to the lynch mob in chapter 22 seethes with contempt for “the average man.” Critics have often argued that such a bitter speech is out of place in the middle of this novel, but in fact, Huck’s narrative furnishes a lot of support for his contempt.
   1. We see village loafers setting dogs on fire for amusement.
   2. We see the “aristocratic” Shepherdsons and Grangerfords killing children in the feud in the name of “honor.”
   3. Even the middle-class people of St. Petersburg, the same group that participated in Tom’s entertainments, look much less likable when they flock across the river to see the scene of Huck’s supposed murder—though few made any effort to rescue him from Pap’s vicious abuse.
   B. From this point of view, the raft is less the fulfillment of American society’s ideals than a refuge from the evils and sordidness of American society itself.

IV. As a work of social criticism, *Huck Finn* is both damning and disarming.
   A. Because Huck is not consciously a critic, but rather someone who sees the world as much more virtuous than himself, his descriptions of cruelty and greed have extraordinary power.
   B. Because the world that readers inhabit, however, is Huck’s consciousness, we always have his “sound heart” to fall back on. Unsuspected by himself, his goodness redeems the social world from its grimness and even immunizes the reader, who after all, appreciates Huck as no one in the novel does, against being part of the “average” that Sherburn scornfully condemns.

V. This kind of reciprocity governs the achievement of the novel as a whole. Written in the middle of Twain’s career, the book is delicately balanced between humor and anger, belief in mankind and skepticism about what Twain would, within ten years, start calling “the damned human race.” The novel’s deeply conflicted character is perhaps the best sign of its power to continue to delight, appall, and transform its readers.

**Essential Reading:**
Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

**Supplementary Reading:**
Bloom, ed., *Huck Finn*.
Sattelmeyer and Crowley, eds., *One Hundred Years of “Huckleberry Finn.”*

**Questions to Consider:**
1. Huck is a very solemn boy, but many accounts of the novel describe it as a comic masterpiece. Where do you see humor in the book, and how does it work?
2. Tom Sawyer returns to play a role in *Huckleberry Finn*. Do you see him the same way in this novel as in his own *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*? If not, how is he different?
Lecture Sixteen

_Huck Finn_, IV: Classrooms and Controversy

**Scope:** This lecture begins by examining the most recent attacks on _Huck Finn_: the case that many in our time have made against Twain’s book as racist. It next examines the claims of the novel’s contemporary defenders that it is not only not racist but, in fact, anti-racist. From these competing arguments, we will move toward a third way of looking at it, as both an exposé of racism and a perpetuation of it. We will locate the novel’s treatment of slavery and African Americans in the context of the specific period during which Twain wrote it. We look specifically at which parts of the novel its contemporary American audience laughed hardest at and discuss the way in which making a joke of the quest to free the slave served the psychic needs of that society. We then go on to discuss what the novel can teach us about our society and the past it comes from. As a conclusion, we consider the reasons for and against teaching the book in our classrooms.

**Outline**

I. This last lecture on _Huck Finn_ looks directly at the controversy that has swirled around the novel for the last twenty years. This can be summed up by two questions: Is the novel racist or anti-racist? Should it be taught in America’s public school classrooms?

   A. The novel does use the word “nigger” more than two hundred times, although no one in Twain’s time objected to this. The earliest attack on the novel for its language and its representation of African Americans came in the 1950s, when it was temporarily banned from New York City schools.

   B. Since 1982, there has been an aggressive national campaign to stop teaching the book; one of its leaders is a man named John H. Wallace, and the campaign has had the support of many parents and others in African American communities.

   C. In response, a number of voices have been raised, especially by those in the community of Mark Twain scholarship, to defend the novel against any attempt to censor it.

   D. Most of the debate has been divided into two camps: either the novel is racist or anti-racist.

      1. As recently as 1992, Wallace referred to _Huck Finn_ as “the most grotesque example of racist trash ever written.”

      2. Beginning in 1982, one of the book’s most vocal and prolific advocates has been Shelley Fisher Fishkin, who reads the novel specifically as “an attack on racism.”

II. It would be more useful, and more accurate, to acknowledge that the novel itself contains both racist and anti-racist modes of expression.

   A. It is the _novel_ that the argument should focus on. The discussion is often about whether Clemens himself was racist, but that misses a crucial point.

      1. Born into a slave-holding society, Clemens was certainly, like Huck, trained in racist habits of thought.

      2. When he grew up and married, for example, into a family that was prominent for its abolitionist convictions, Clemens’s own views about race and race relations were unquestionably “reconstructed.” He believed that white America owed blacks reparations for slavery and paid an African American student’s tuition at Yale.

      3. The crucial issue, however, is not what Clemens privately thought, but what Twain’s novel publicly does.

   B. The book’s defenders are right to ask its critics to recognize its irony: that Huck’s language and preconceptions about blacks are the products of his training by a society that needed to rationalize slavery by dehumanizing slaves.

      1. The novel’s dramatization of the psychology of racism is a powerful critique of prejudice.

      2. But again, the larger issue is not what Huck calls Jim, or even how Huck sees him at times in terms of the derogatory stereotype of the “nigger,” but how the novel as a whole depicts Jim.
III. In the opening chapters, and especially at the end, the novel’s depiction of Jim relies heavily on the period’s most popular form of racism: the minstrel stereotype.
   A. Jim’s dialogues with Huck about “speculatin’ in stock,” for example, derive directly from the kind of humor that was a staple of blackface minstrelsy.
   B. In the chapters in which Tom Sawyer reappears to stage Jim’s burlesque-romantic escape from slavery, the suffering of a slave is turned into a series of jokes.

IV. These sections were exactly the ones that Twain knew would be most popular with his immediate audience.
   A. In 1884–1885, Twain undertook a lengthy lecture tour to publicize the novel. Readings from *Huck Finn* formed a featured part of his performance. The parts he read were the minstrel dialogues and the Tom Sawyer chapters.
   B. Contemporary newspaper accounts of those lectures allow us to hear how uproariously Americans laughed at those scenes; Twain himself called the Tom Sawyer chapters the funniest single item in his humorist’s repertoire.
   C. Twentieth-century readers have often expressed discomfort with the novel’s ending, but we can understand why Twain’s contemporary audiences loved it so much.
      1. The acute social problem of the years in which *Huck Finn* was written and published—1876–1885—was the place of the freedman, the former slave, in American society.
      2. After 1876, the North turned its back on the emancipated slaves and allowed the South to build the system of Jim Crow segregation on the ruins of Reconstruction.
      3. By allowing Tom to turn the issue into a joke, Twain’s novel enabled late-nineteenth-century Americans to laugh off any guilt or anxiety they had about the fate of the freedman.
      4. Could Huck and Jim free Twain? Or, rather, free Clemens from the need for popularity that “Mark Twain” was created to satisfy? That is, perhaps, the deepest biographical question raised by Twain’s decision to rewrite *Tom Sawyer* as *Huck Finn*. The answer turns out to be no, so he wound up rewriting *Huck Finn* as a version of *Tom Sawyer*.

V. Should the book be taught in our schools? That remains its most challenging question of all, not just to those of us who teach, but to all citizens in our democratic society.
   A. The book’s divided legacy mirrors the culture we inherit.
      1. At its best, it lives up to its ideals of equality and works toward its goal of liberty.
      2. At its worst, it perpetuates the forms of prejudice that continue to enslave people and ideas long after formal emancipation.
   B. The novel should not be taught if the goal is to evade the fact of racism. But if the goal is to acknowledge and try to move beyond the racist patterns we inherit from the past, teaching it can be a great occasion for teachers and students to explore the issues that continue to pain and divide us today and that will not go away on their own.

**Essential Reading:**
Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

**Supplementary Reading:**
Arac, “*Huckleberry Finn*” as Idol and Target.
Fishkin, *Lighting out for the Territory*.
Leonard, Tenney, and Davis, *Satire or Evasion*?

**Questions to Consider:**
1. Were you taught *Huckleberry Finn* in school? If so, at what level or levels? Was the issue of race discussed and, if so, how?
2. What do you think are the potential gains and losses at stake in requiring young Americans to read the novel? Which is greater?
Lecture Seventeen

Connecticut Yankee, I: Unwriting the Middle Ages

Scope: The lecture begins by discussing the novel Twain wrote after Huck Finn as a tale of travel in both time and space. When Hank Morgan, Twain’s “Connecticut Yankee,” wakes up in King Arthur’s court, Twain creates an occasion for all kinds of juxtapositions, humorous and polemical: between American democracy and European aristocracy, between nineteenth-century ideals of progress and common sense and sixth-century ideals of tradition and faith, between (it seems to Hank) freedom and slavery. We will explore those juxtapositions along two main lines of thought. First, we will look at how the novel as Hank’s first-person narrative serves Twain’s project as an “un-writer.” In particular, we will discuss the relationship between Sir Walter Scott’s medieval romances, which Twain claimed were responsible for the American Civil War, and Hank’s “unpoetical” account of the Middle Ages. Second, we will consider how the novel seems to serve both Twain’s ambitions as an American writer and his American readers’ national self-image as a vindication of the American way Hank himself pledges allegiance to, with its cornerstone values of religious freedom, political liberty, free enterprise, individual opportunity, and progress. We will conclude by talking about the mixed reaction reviewers had when the book was published—American praise and British hostility—as a guide to contemporary interpretations of the tale.

Outline

I. A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court may be the first novel involving a time-traveler. It is probably Mark Twain’s most fantastic published work. It is also, however, consistent with the various preoccupations of his imagination and career.
   A. As a travel writer, Twain had often thought about a book focusing on England.
   B. He was always interested in history, especially British history; note The Prince and the Pauper and his other Elizabethan works.
   C. As both a realist and a humorist, he often resorted to “un-writing”—taking an existing text or genre and writing a burlesque or parody of it.
      2. Malory’s narrative is a series of heroic tales of the Knights of the Round Table. Twain includes a number of passages from it in his novel, but his intention was to expose (as Hank Morgan, his Connecticut Yankee, puts it) “this nonsense of knight-errantry.”

II. Behind Twain’s desire to ridicule Malory was his quarrel with another British writer, Sir Walter Scott, whose medieval romances, such as Ivanhoe, were enormously popular throughout the nineteenth century.
   A. Writing as Mark Twain in Life on the Mississippi, he had already attacked what he called the “Sir Walter disease.”
      1. Twain says that Scott did “more real and lasting harm than any other individual who ever wrote” by acts of imaginative enchantment that caused readers to prefer “the sham chivalries of a brainless and worthless long-vanished [medieval] society” to “the genuine and wholesome civilization” of the present.
      2. Because the influence of these books was so great in the South, Twain says that Scott was “in great measure responsible” for the Civil War.
   B. Because Scott’s romances were still widely read in the 1880s, part of the job Twain gives his Yankee as the book’s first-person narrator is to “teach” American readers “to see” the European past as the true “Reign of Terror.”
      1. As an observer, Hank is practical, not romantic: he describes himself as “barren of sentiment and poetry.”
      2. As a narrator, he describes not only the gorgeously dressed knights and ladies, but the impoverished peasants and the enchained slaves that Scott’s romances left out of the account.
III. Twain uses Hank to provide more than a realist “re-vision” of the past; because Hank’s standard of judgment is the nineteenth-century American society he comes from, his critique is, at the same time, a vindication of the present Twain and his readers live in.

A. Hank defines the culture of sixth-century England dialectically as the antithesis to the values of modern America.
   1. In politics, the opposition is between aristocratic privilege and democratic equality, between slavery and freedom.
   2. In religion, it is between an established Catholic Church and Protestant freedom of conscience.
   3. In the history of the human mind, it is between superstition, magic, submission, and reverence and rationality, science, individualism, and enterprise.

B. In *Connecticut Yankee*, Twain is doing overtly what had been implied throughout *Innocents Abroad*: celebrating America as an improvement on the Old World. By sending Hank east and back in time, he is vindicating the myths of the westward movement of history and the idea of progress that American culture uses to locate its place in space and time.

IV. To contemporary readers, Hank was an admirable figure, and his narrative was read as an un-ironic demonstration of the superiority of the “American way.” Reading the novel in the twenty-first century, however, raises questions those contemporary readers did not ask.

A. Twain’s publishing company advertised the book as an act of patriotism by a satirically unsparing enemy of “un-American” values.

B. Reviews divided along national lines.
   1. British critics attacked the book’s historical inaccuracies and cultural irreverence.
   2. Nearly all its American critics endorsed its representation of both the evils of the Old World and the virtues of the New; the only exception was an Anglophile reviewer in Boston.

C. From the record, it seems that all contemporary readers accepted Hank as Twain’s surrogate and mouthpiece and his unqualified praise of modern America as Twain’s unambiguous judgment. But it is possible to read *Connecticut Yankee* as we have to read *Huckleberry Finn*, as an ironic, unreliable first-person narrative about what its narrator does not see.

**Essential Reading:**
Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*.
Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*, chapters 40 and 46.

**Supplementary Reading:**
Harris, *Mark Twain’s Escape from Time*.
Salomon, *Mark Twain and the Image of History*.

**Questions to Consider:**
1. What are your associations with “Camelot” and the “Knights of the Round Table”? What role does that legend still play in our ideas about history? Would you agree with Twain that it is a potentially dangerous idealization of an anti-democratic and, thus, un-American, past?
2. How is Hank as a traveler in the Old World similar to the narrator of *Innocents Abroad*? How are the goals of these two books as pilgrimages to the shrines of Europe similar?
Lecture Eighteen

Connecticut Yankee, II:
Revisiting the Nineteenth Century

Scope: We will start by considering the idea that Hank’s first-person narrative is, like Huck’s and the many deadpan humorous stories Twain told from the platform, unreliable and ironic. Reading it this way means looking for all the things that Hank himself does not see or understand, listening to what his voice tells us that he himself is not able to hear. While he can see how the Arthurians have been “trained” by their culture, we can see how deeply Hank has internalized the preconceptions of his time and place. Read this way, the novel reveals more about nineteenth-century America than about sixth-century England. Its increasingly ominous dramatization of the commercial and industrial transformations of modernity, especially its apocalyptic ending, which anticipates the wars of the twentieth century, suggests doubts about progress and democracy that lurk under the novel’s overt faiths.

Outline

I. All the extra-textual evidence we have suggests that the Connecticut Yankee we were talking about in the previous lecture, the celebration of modern America and its faiths in progress, democracy, freedom, and individual opportunity, was the book Mark Twain consciously thought he was writing.
   A. In this lecture, we will consider a different way to read the novel: as an irony, an expression of skepticism toward those same faiths. Read ironically, the novel exposes Twain’s America at least as much as it does Walter Scott’s Middle Ages.
   B. The reader of Mark Twain is familiar with his ironic techniques.
      1. His standard humorous story or platform performance relies on the idea of a deadpan narrator, a narrator who does not see what’s funny about the tale he is telling.
      2. In Huckleberry Finn, Twain put this technique to thematically profound uses: the point of Huck’s story is that he cannot understand his story as the reader does.

II. Although many of Hank’s opinions recognizably echo Twain’s, he is a created character, like Huck, and we can listen to his voice for what it says about his preconceptions.
   A. Hank’s language, in particular his figures of speech, says a lot about what it means to be a “Yankee of the Yankees.”
      1. As a foreman from Hartford’s Colt Arms factory, Hank sees much of the world in mechanical or technological terms: “Man Factory,” “government machinery,” and so on.
      2. As a self-made man, his word patterns betray how pervasively he thinks in capitalist terms: to describe King Arthur standing up, for example, he says “a farm could have got up quicker if there was any kind of boom in real estate.”
   B. As an outsider to the culture of the sixth century, Hank can see clearly how the Arthurians have been “trained,” which is his word for ideological conditioning. By juxtaposing his point of view with theirs, the novel also allows readers to see what Hank remains blind to: the way he has himself been “trained” by the “inherited ideas” of his culture.
      1. We can argue that Hank believes as uncritically, even as superstitiously, in modern technology as the Arthurians believe in Merlin’s magic.
      2. He extols the soap factory he builds in Camelot, for example, as a way to clean up the people of the Dark Ages, but he sees no problem with the air pollution the factory causes.

III. Hank’s determination to save the Old World by turning Arthur’s England into a version of the world he was raised in transforms the story from a realistic account of the Middle Ages into a surreal vision of late-nineteenth-century America.
   A. To Hank, this is progress—bringing light, including the electric light, to the Dark Ages.
   B. To the novel’s reader, “progress” may be ambiguous.
      1. When the Round Table is turned into a stock exchange, for example, money seems to replace both birth and heroic virtue as the source of status: even the Siege Perilous is for sale.
2. Hank’s belief in technology is made especially problematic as the destructive capacity of machines is increasingly dramatized.

C. Every Camelot story, of course, must end tragically, but the apocalyptic climax of *Connecticut Yankee* is a particularly disturbing revision of Malory.
   1. Hank believes that he can bring about an enlightened “republic” by turning Merlin’s Cave into a machine for killing knights.
   2. His machine kills more than 25,000 people—transforming the landscape into a wasteland that anticipates the battlefields of twentieth-century world wars.
   3. And Hank himself winds up trapped and defeated by his faith in the machine.

D. The novel’s ending calls the very idea of progress into serious question.
   1. “The whole beautiful and broad country landscape” in which Hank first woke up has been destroyed.
   2. At the end, Hank himself is nostalgic for the past.

IV. Read this way, *Connecticut Yankee* is a guide to Twain’s and his culture’s unconscious, their late-nineteenth-century misgivings about modernity.
   A. As an account of the collision between a slave-holding, aristocratic, agricultural society and an individualistic, democratic, industrial one, the novel rehearses the story of Twain’s America during the century: the South Clemens was born into and remembered in conflict with the North Mark Twain settled in and epitomized.
   
   B. The title of Hank’s narrative, “The Lost Land,” points toward a nostalgic longing for what has been despoiled or destroyed in the name of progress. The book’s dramatized doubts about technological change may have been culturally representative.
   
   C. Twain himself had made a huge investment, both psychological and financial, in technological improvements.
      1. At the time he was finishing the novel, he was pouring more and more money into Paige’s typesetting machine.
      2. Consciously, he remained a devout believer in it as a modern miracle, but by having Hank undone through his faith in machines, Twain may have given voice to his deepest doubts.

**Essential Reading:**
Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*.

**Supplementary Reading:**
Smith, *Mark Twain’s Fable of Progress*.

**Questions to Consider:**
1. What kind of representative of American culture is Hank Morgan? Do you think we are always supposed to like and admire him?
2. Hank believes democratic elections are demonstrably an improvement over hereditary privilege as a way for nations to determine leaders, but do the novel’s many crowd scenes, scenes mainly of Hank manipulating an audience, support the idea that “the people” are the only legitimate source of power?
Lecture Nineteen

Connecticut Yankee, III: The Quest for Status

Scope: In this last lecture on Connecticut Yankee, we consider the novel from yet another point of view: as Twain’s least guarded, most revealing account of the dynamic of performance and popularity that was carrying him toward a steadily higher and brighter place in the sky as a “star.” The lecture begins by rehearsing what Tom Sawyer revealed about the quest for attention, then looks at how that issue reappears in Huck Finn, much more cynically, in the performances of the King and the Duke, with whom Huck and Jim travel for much of the novel. We then look at Hank as “Sir Boss”: the public self he creates and perpetuates through the series of “miracles” he performs for crowds of admiring Arthurians. In these scenes of performance, the novel opens an ever-increasing gap between Hank’s real beliefs and the false self he wears to satisfy his audiences. We end by comparing the self Hank enacts and the shows he puts on to Clemens’s public career as Mark Twain; we look closely at what Hank can help us understand about the popularity of Twain’s performances as both writer and live entertainer and his own growing alienation from those roles.

Outline

I. In the first two lectures on Connecticut Yankee, we have asked the novel to help us answer a wide range of questions: about Twain’s project as a realist and the cultural work he did for contemporary American readers; about Twain’s use of irony and his growing skepticism about the human race. In this third lecture, we will consider the novel in yet another way: as Twain’s most revealing account of performing for an audience, in particular the kind of performance that Sam Clemens was engaged in as Mark Twain.

II. Every “Mark Twain” text—travel book, novel, lecture, speech—was a specific kind of performance. At the same time, performing is a major theme in much of that work.

A. Earlier in the course, we looked at Tom Sawyer as a “glittering hero,” as someone who craved public attention.
   1. In the Sunday school scene, Tom is exposed as a fraudulent claimant for status.
   2. By the end of the narrative, though, his popularity is made more admirable by his legitimate acts of heroism, especially saving Becky in the cave when no one else is looking.

B. In Huck Finn, on the other hand, Twain provides a savage critique of popular performance in the “shines” of the King and the Duke.
   1. All down the river, their various cons exploit the credulity, hypocrisy, and prejudices of “the people,” conceived as a series of audiences.
   2. They make a lot of money from these performances, but their “Royal Nonesuch,” in which the naked and painted King cavorts for a delighted crowd, reveals how thoroughly the performer can debase himself to satisfy others.

III. The emphasis of Connecticut Yankee is on Hank Morgan’s repeated performances for the sixth-century people among whom he finds himself.

A. His performances include “The Eclipse,” “Merlin’s Tower,” “The Restoration of the Holy Fountain,” “The Yankee’s Fight with the Knights,” and so on.

B. Although Hank is forced into putting on his first show—pretending to cause a solar eclipse to save himself from the stake—it is also clear that what he calls the “circus side” of his temperament delights in being at center stage and producing theatrical effects.

C. Unlike Hank’s allegiances to capitalism and technology, this show-business personality seems implausible in a former factory foreman. It results from Twain’s projection of his own preoccupations onto his character.
   1. We see a lot of echoes between Hank and Twain as showmen. “Doors open at 10:30,” writes Hank about the restoration of the fountain, even though that takes place outside in the sixth century, where there are neither doors nor clocks. “Doors open at 7:30, the trouble begins at 8:00” was one of Twain’s signature lines for his lectures.
2. Because Hank is a created character, Twain could project his mixed feelings about performance onto his story less guardedly than would otherwise have been possible. Thus, Hank’s story can give us access, in ways Twain’s public statements could not, to how it felt to be “Mark Twain.”

IV. In the story of Hank Morgan as “Sir Boss,” Twain dramatizes the split between his true self and his celebrity image.

A. Readers know that Hank hates sixth-century superstitions and hopes eventually to wean the people from their belief in magic and magicians like Merlin.

B. But to the people of the sixth century, Hank appears as “Sir Boss,” a mightier wizard than Merlin.
   1. To command their attention, Hank must address himself to their prejudices.
   2. He blows up Merlin’s Tower, but only by imitating Merlin.

C. Thus, Hank the reformer is deeply estranged from, and at odds with, Hank the entertainer.
   1. When he restores the Holy Fountain, for example, he is serving the interests of the Church he defines as the enemy of his beliefs.
   2. To maintain his image, he must continually betray himself.

V. Through Hank’s story, we can see the rewards and costs of Clemens’s career as Mark Twain.

A. Popularity is his equivalent to aristocratic rank, his way of being somebody.
   1. He is gratified to be dubbed “The Boss” by the people themselves.
   2. His spectacular performances allow him to feel like “a superior being.”

B. As an account of the difference between rank and status, between the Arthuriens’ feudal system and Hank’s anxious career as popular favorite, the novel implies a deep truth about the nature of identity in a democracy. As Hank notes, when your identity or “superiority” depends on other people’s attention and regard, you have to work on your image all the time.

C. In fact, by becoming a “star” in the sixth century, Hank is trapped by his audience.
   1. In his performances, he must continue to satisfy the people’s expectations.
   2. Entertaining audiences turns out to be incompatible with telling them the truth.
   3. Although as a reformer, Hank hoped to liberate the people, as a celebrity, he becomes captive to the dynamic of performance itself.

Essential Reading:
Mark Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court.

Supplementary Reading:
Fetterly, “Yankee Showman and Reformer.”

Questions to Consider:
1. How is Hank as “Sir Boss” like the con men who masquerade in Huck Finn as the King and the Duke?
2. What are the people of Arthurian England like as “performers”? The knights inflate their adventures when the get back to Camelot, and even the “hermits” seem to be posing for the crowd—is Twain’s feudal society organized around status, too?
Lecture Twenty

Pudd’nhead Wilson: Fictions of Law and Custom

Scope: Pudd’nhead Wilson in our time is probably the second most frequently taught of Twain’s books, after only Huck Finn. We will examine its claims on our attention from three perspectives. The first part of the lecture will consider it as Twain’s last completed imaginative return to the village Clemens had grown up in: we will compare Dawson’s Landing, the setting of this novel, to St. Petersburg in Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn. The second part of the lecture will take up the novel’s representation of race: the story is set in motion by switching the “black” child of a slave and the “white” child of a master; it is resolved when these two are restored to their original places. What this plot says or implies about human equalities and racial differences is currently the subject of much debate. As with Huck Finn, we will consider how, in the context of ideas about race current in 1894, in this novel, Twain critiques or confirms the prejudices of his cultural time and place. We will end by looking at the mysterious figure of “Pudd’nhead” Wilson himself and discuss the reasons why, given his rise to status and popularity, Twain decided to call the novel The Tragedy of Pudd’nhead Wilson.

Outline

I. The Tragedy of Pudd’nhead Wilson, published twenty years after The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, was Twain’s last major novel.
   A. In its time, it was best known for “Pudd’nhead Wilson’s Calendar”—a collection of aphorisms, such as “When angry, count four; when very angry, swear,” that were widely reprinted.
   B. In our time, it is attracting more and more attention from critics and teachers as Twain’s most explicit representation of slavery and race, though there is no sign of interpretive consensus yet about what the novel says about race.
   C. In this one lecture on the novel, we will consider it from three perspectives:
      1. As Twain’s last published account of the world of Sam Clemens’s childhood.
      2. As a novel that raises vexing questions about race and identity.
      3. As the “tragedy” of Pudd’nhead Wilson, a surprising title given the way Wilson winds up loved and successful.

II. If Tom Sawyer recalls Hannibal nostalgically and Huck Finn looks at it realistically, in Pudd’nhead Wilson, Twain’s treatment of the antebellum slave-holding village is ironic.
   A. Twain moves the village, now called Dawson’s Landing, further south than Hannibal and St. Petersburg—down the river—to heighten the sense of enslavement that captures all the major characters.
   B. Although their houses have “white-washed exteriors,” the white citizens of Dawson’s Landing are defined by their hypocrisies, prejudices, and moral failures.
      1. Inside the “haunted house” in St. Petersburg, Tom and Huck are threatened by the alien figure of “Injun Joe” and ultimately find treasure.
      2. In Dawson’s Landing, the haunted house shelters Roxy and her son, former slaves whose existence and criminalities betray the sins of the white fathers from the finest families in the town.

III. The novel’s plot involves Roxy’s attempt to free her son from slavery by switching him with the infant of a white slave-owner, an act that potentially subverts the very category of race—in the same way, for example, that the switched identities of Twain’s Prince and the Pauper expose the arbitrariness of social rank. But the novel, as the current critical debate over it reveals, does not take any unambiguous stand on the idea of race.
   A. At the start, the narrative overtly proclaims that race is a socially constructed illusion.
      1. Roxy is “fifteen-sixteenths white,” “but the one sixteenth of her which was black out-voted the other fifteen parts and made her a negro.” Her son, the illegitimate child of one of the town’s leading aristocrats, is “thirty-one parts white”—and a “negro” only “by a fiction of law and custom.”
      2. The very fact of switching the babies seems to prove that there is no essential difference between “negroes” and “whites.”
B. After the switch, however, her son’s behavior as a “white” could be cited to support the contention that race is an innate, absolute fact.
   1. Tom turns out to be a physical coward and a criminal. Roxy herself attributes his badness to “de nigger” in him.
   2. Although Roxy’s racism could be attributed to the way her mind has been conditioned by the prejudices of the society that also enslaves her body, even the narrative refers to Tom’s “native viciousness” and “vicious nature.”

C. The issue of racial identity was even more important in the 1890s, when the novel was published, than in the 1830s and 1840s, when it is set.
   1. The system of “Jim Crow” segregation that had grown up in the South and that would be affirmed as constitutional by the Supreme Court in 1896 was based on the same “law and custom” of what in the novel Wilson calls “black blood.”
   2. Although the novel clearly treats slavery as a benighted system, the story it tells about Tom (who becomes a thief and murderer) might be used to confirm the rationale often used to defend segregation: that a system of discipline and control was needed to keep the “native” tendencies of “blacks” under control.

D. The courtroom scene with which the novel climaxes not only exposes the real killer hidden in the midst of Dawson’s Landing’s populace, but it also explicitly lays down the “law and custom” that categorizes people as either “white and free” or “negro and slave.”

IV. The courtroom scene is a public triumph for David Wilson, but his masterful performance can be read ironically as his own ultimate enslavement.
   A. The citizens erase the label “Pudd’nhead” that they had made him wear for twenty years. In the end, he is “courted, admired, stared at” as Tom Sawyer was at the end of Twain’s first novel about village heroism.
   B. Twain himself, however, labeled the story *The Tragedy of Pudd’nhead Wilson.*
      1. An outsider from a non-slave-holding state, Wilson also resembles Hank Morgan in Arthurian England—he begins as a mysterious stranger.
      2. Also like Morgan, he becomes a celebrity by surrendering his own beliefs to the prejudices and superstitions of his audience.
      3. As a reenactment of Morgan’s fate, Wilson’s “tragedy” suggests how alienated Twain had come to feel from his own extraordinary popularity.

**Essential Reading:**
Mark Twain, *The Tragedy of Pudd’nhead Wilson.*

**Supplementary Reading:**
Gilman and Robinson, eds., *Pudd’nhead Wilson: Race, Conflict and Culture.*
Railton, “The Tragedy of Mark Twain, by Pudd’nhead Wilson.”

**Questions to Consider:**
1. Dawson’s Landing is one of Twain’s last attempts to represent Hannibal, the village he grew up in. How does it resemble or differ from St. Petersburg in *Tom Sawyer* and *Huck Finn*?
2. Does the novel define “race” as either a fact of nature or a construction of culture? Does it suggest that there is, for example, such a biological thing as “black blood” flowing underneath Roxy’s and Tom’s “white skins”? 
Scope: This lecture focuses on the last major phase of Twain’s career: his attempt at the turn of the nineteenth century into the twentieth to use his well-known voice to protest political injustices at home and, especially, abroad. We begin by looking at Connecticut Yankee from yet another point of view. As the story of Hank Morgan’s efforts to impose the American way on an unwilling foreign population and a culture he does not understand, the book can be considered our first anti-imperialist novel, prescient in the way it anticipates the country’s emergence as a world power. From that novel, we will go on to consider the outspokenly anti-colonialist pieces Twain wrote in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War, especially “To the Person Sitting in Darkness” and “The War Prayer.” These works show Twain testing the uses and limits of humor to arouse indignation and the desire for social change. Finally, the lecture discusses why many of his most powerful protest pieces (including “The War Prayer”) remained unpublished until long after Twain’s death and how that pattern can help us understand the rhetorical limits of the “Mark Twain” persona.

Outline

I. Twain published his last novel in 1896 and his last travel book in 1897. Of the eclectic group of texts he published during the last ten years of his life, the most significant are his anti-imperialist writings.
   A. It could be argued that he was already an anti-imperialist writer in 1889, when Connecticut Yankee appeared.
      1. Hank Morgan seeks to impose his American ideals on an unwilling foreign population.
      2. The rhetoric Hank uses to explain his plans—bringing the blessings of civilization to a primitive people—is exactly the language with which the imperialist powers justified their colonizations of Africa and Asia.
      3. Hank’s attempts to “sivilize” the sixth century prove incredibly destructive.
   B. It was in 1900, however, that Twain explicitly declared that “I am an anti-imperialist. I am opposed to having the eagle put its talons on any other land.”

II. By 1900, the United States was rapidly becoming a world power. Mark Twain’s involvement in that process was complex.
   A. His rise to fame coincided with the nation’s rise to international power.
      1. As we noted in the lectures on Innocents Abroad, by taking on the world rhetorically in his travel books from an unabashedly American perspective, Twain’s works helped Americans imagine themselves as a force in the world.
      2. As both unmistakably American and one of the world’s most well known and most popular figures, Twain’s international stature was already a projection of cultural power.
   B. When the Spanish-American War began, Twain was living in Vienna. At first, he defended his country’s actions as “just and righteous.”
   C. His conversion to an anti-imperialist stance was caused by two factors:
      1. What he had seen of the British Empire on his “Around the World” tour.
      2. The shift in American policy in the Philippines, from driving Spain out to claiming the country for itself.

III. After his return to the United States at the end of 1900, Twain began to speak and write against European and American aggression around the world. “To the Person Sitting in Darkness” is his most significant attempt to use his pen to combat the sword.
   A. The piece was published in The North American Review in February 1901 and reprinted as a pamphlet by the New York Anti-Imperialist League, which distributed 125,000 copies of it.
   B. It indicts the acts of Western missionaries in China, England in South Africa, Germany and Russia in eastern Asia, and most pointedly, the United States in the Philippines.
C. As The Nation said in an admiring review, Twain’s “satirical weapons were never keener.” His wit is Swiftian in its ironic suggestion that the Western powers are ruining the market for “the blessings of civilization” by such undisguised forms of aggression and greed. The third world—the people “sitting in darkness”—will stop buying the fiction of Western benevolence and progress.

D. Rhetorically, he stages his protest as an appeal to, rather than an attack on, the American people.
1. He focuses his critique on the leaders of the Western countries, not the people; President McKinley, for example, is referred to as “the Master.”
2. He praises the country’s actions in Cuba as the morally commendable “usual and regular American game” of fighting for freedom, while in the Philippines, “the Master” gives in to the temptation to play “the European game”—oppressing the weak for the sake of power and profit.

IV. Most critics would agree that Twain’s other major protest work is “The War Prayer,” written in 1904–1905.
A. It is one of the greatest anti-war statements in American literature, but it is also unmistakably Mark Twain’s expression of the issue.
1. Its setting is a scene of public performance: a church service held to ask God’s blessings on a nation’s army that is about to go to war.
2. It revolves around the difference between satisfying and violating an audience’s assumptions. A mysterious stranger identifies himself as a messenger from God and translates the congregation’s prayers for victory into a graphic account of the misery they are also asking God to inflict on their enemy’s populace.
3. The messenger’s truth is ignored, and he (like “Pudd’nhead” Wilson) is mislabeled—as a “lunatic.”

B. Twain himself never published the piece. “I have told the truth in that,” he said about the sketch, “and only dead men can tell the truth in this world.”

V. “The War Prayer” raises the larger question of the place social protest occupied in Twain’s career.
A. In addition to “To the Person Sitting in Darkness,” he published several more anti-imperialist pieces during the early 1900s. But he wrote much more that he did not publish.
B. “To the Person” attracted considerable criticism, in particular from the missionary press, but it was also widely praised as proof of the “humorist’s” serious concern with humanity. This kind of high-mindedness became an important addition to the image of Mark Twain.
C. Despite such evidence, and his own established stature, Twain remained vulnerable to the idea of unpopularity. His most outspoken attacks on injustice—including “The United States of Lyncherdom” (also written in 1901)—remained un-spoken as well.

Essential Reading:
Mark Twain, “To the Person Sitting in Darkness,” “The United States of Lyncherdom,” and “The War Prayer” (in Budd).

Supplementary Reading:
Budd, Mark Twain: Social Philosopher.

Questions to Consider:
1. Could the argument of “To the Person Sitting in Darkness” be used against Hank Morgan’s attempt to colonialize the Dark Ages?
2. What is “The War Prayer” saying about trying to tell the truth in public?
Lecture Twenty-Two
Late Twain in Public

Scope: During the final fifteen years of his career, Twain was celebrated less for what he wrote than for what he “was.” The next two lectures will discuss this period and figure, respectively, from outside and from inside. From “outside,” this lecture will begin by discussing a set of triumphs, such as his well-publicized conquest of bankruptcy that confirmed his status as a kind of best American self, an icon of the nation’s culture. In particular, we will focus on the meaning that his successful “Around the World” tour had for his public in this country and two moments of spectacle “at home” that seemed the perfect last act to the story of his success as the first citizen of America’s emerging celebrity culture: his seventieth birthday dinner and the moment at which he began to wear the white suit that is still so inescapably a part of his image.

Outline

I. For the last fifteen years of his life, Twain’s most spectacular achievement was essentially to be “Mark Twain,” the greatest literary celebrity the nation has ever had.
   A. Celebrity status fulfilled the deepest of Sam Clemens’s ambitions.
      1. The dreams of Tom Canty, the Elizabethan pauper, in his ragged hovel in “Offal Court,” are a good guide to Clemens’s longings.
      2. Even more relevant are Tom Sawyer’s plans, to run away from St. Petersburg in order to come back later as a famous pirate, “the Black Avenger of the Spanish Main.”
   B. As soon as he was old enough, Clemens did run away from Hannibal to pursue those dreams. In 1902, after the University of Missouri invited him to receive an honorary doctorate, he went back as “Mark Twain, the beloved hero of American literature.” His triumphant homecoming was a personal and a public triumph.
      1. In St. Louis, crowds lined the Mississippi to see him onboard a steamboat named after him.
      2. During the five days he spent in Hannibal, he was mobbed by old friends, fans, and photographers and (as we can tell from his letters to his wife) overwhelmed by his own feelings.
   C. In the next lecture, we will explore what being “Mark Twain” felt like from within Sam Clemens’s consciousness, but the focus of this lecture is on how that figure was enshrined and defined from without, by an admiring American audience. We will isolate five episodes in the process by which Twain became the brightest star in the American constellation.

II. In 1898, Twain finished paying off all his creditors in full.
   A. The letters these businessmen wrote to acknowledge repayment were saved by Henry Huttleston Rogers, Twain’s financial advisor, and are in Virginia’s Barrett Collection.
   B. The note they sound is appreciation that not only has Mark Twain given people so much to laugh at, but he has now also given them an example of virtuous conduct to imitate.
   C. That note became an important motif in the symphony of praise that the press played for Twain as well. When he returned to America in 1900, newspaper accounts gave prominence to his freedom from debt as a kind of heroism.

III. Ironically, Twain’s achievement in repaying his debts was regularly compared to Sir Walter Scott’s similar accomplishment two generations earlier. This pattern is a good reminder of how anxious America still was, despite Twain’s own writings, to measure up to the standards of Europe. In this respect, too, the figure of “Mark Twain” vindicated America’s ambitions.
   A. His “Around the World” lecture tour (1895–1896) was widely reported in the newspapers at home, with something like the patriotic pride Americans felt watching John Glenn orbit the earth seventy years later. The large and appreciative audiences who flocked to hear him in Australia, New Zealand, India, and South Africa were seen as symbols of the country’s international standing.
   B. The ultimate sign of this shared global success came in 1907, when England’s prestigious Oxford University bestowed on Mark Twain an honorary Doctor of Literature degree. The event was widely publicized through newspaper reports and editorial cartoons, which again treat Twain’s accomplishment as
one the nation can share: although recognized and given his rightful place among the aristocrats of the Old
World, he remains a man of the people.

IV. In this country, his status was punctuated by two particular moments of spectacle.
   A. In 1905, Colonel Harvey of Harper’s Weekly hosted a seventieth birthday dinner for Twain at Delmonico’s
      restaurant in New York. Harper’s devoted a thirty-two-page special supplement to the event, and from
      that, we can participate vicariously in the festivities.
      1. The lavishness of the feast and the attendance of millionaires, such as Rogers and Andrew Carnegie,
         were in themselves tributes to Twain’s cultural significance.
      2. From the many speeches and letters read at the event, it is clear that what was being celebrated was
         less Twain’s specific accomplishments as a writer than the example of his performance as “Mark
         Twain.”
   B. That performance reached what might be said to constitute its dramatic climax when, in 1906, Twain
      became the man in the white suit while testifying before Congress about the need for new copyright laws.
      1. Appearing in public in winter dressed completely in white was a carefully plotted act.
      2. It instantly caught the national media’s attention and completely stole the show from the issue of
         copyright.
      3. Although Twain’s well-tailored white suits could be interpreted in a number of ways—it was the
         costume, for example, of the plantation aristocrats in the antebellum South—to his adoring public, the
         suit stood for his individualism, his freedom from conventionality, and his boyish mischievousness
         even as an establishment figure.
      4. It immediately became part of his permanent image.

V. During Twain’s lifetime, America was becoming the “celebrity culture” we still live in today. Perhaps the first
   great citizen of this new culture was “Mark Twain.”
   A. He was helped by the new technologies that made national publicity possible.
      1. It has been suggested that he was the most frequently photographed man in nineteenth-century
         America.
      2. One of the first uses to which Edison put his new phonograph machine was to capture “Mark Twain’s”
         voice.
   B. He was Samuel Clemens’s greatest fictional character, and the story he starred in was the mythic American
      narrative of an obscure and impoverished boy rising to the democratic equivalent of a throne.

Essential Reading:
Mark Twain, “Seventieth Birthday Dinner Speech” (in Budd).

Supplementary Reading:
Budd, Our Mark Twain.

Questions to Consider:
1. Do you ever associate the white suit “Mark Twain” invariably seems to have on in our cultural imagination
   with the figure of the Southern, slave-holding, plantation aristocrat, such as Colonels Grangerford and Sherburn
   in Huck Finn? Or does his wearing it signify something entirely different?
2. What kind of story or truth is Twain telling about himself in the “Seventieth Birthday Dinner Speech”??
Lecture Twenty-Three
Late Twain in Private

Scope: This lecture will consider the more problematic aspects of the end of Twain’s career. We will look specifically at the “Mark Twain” his contemporaries were not allowed to see: his unfinished and unpublished late writings. Some of these are grimly disturbing: fragmentary tales in which the human condition is depicted in such surreal settings as the germ-ridden bloodstream of a drunken derelict or a becalmed ship on an endless, burning sea. But we will also consider one late project that is less overtly catastrophic: his obsessive attempt to dictate his autobiography, to pull a meaningful and coherent narrative out of the events of his life. Out of these sources emerged Twain’s ultimate visions of life as either an insubstantial dream or a mechanistically determined fate.

Outline

I. As we discussed in the previous lecture, the last dozen years of Samuel Clemens’s life as Mark Twain were an almost continuous series of public triumphs. The life he led behind the mask of the genial philosopher, however, was very different. Hamlin Hill, author of the one full-length modern study of that period, describes it as life “in hell.” We don’t want to melodramatize or oversimplify it, but our account of Twain would be incomplete if we left out his late despair.
   A. Although Twain was not cited in *Bartlett’s Quotations* until after his death, by 1900, he was universally regarded as the sage humorist whose sayings the world loved to repeat.
      1. His aphorisms, such as the definition of a classic as “a book everyone praises and no one reads,” quickly became part of the language’s stock of proverbial wisdom.
      2. His famous response to the reporter who called to inquire if Twain were dead—“Reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated”—is a perfect example of how and why his humor was beloved.
   B. His contemporary audience never overheard any of his excoriating comments on the “damned human race,” though in private, he repeated them with a persistence that came close to boring his intimate acquaintances.

II. This last period of his career was surprisingly prolific, but the great bulk of his writing remained both uncompleted and unpublished.
   A. Bernard DeVoto, second editor of the Mark Twain papers, estimated that in these last years, Twain wrote 15,000 pages that remained unpublishable during his life. Much of this total consisted of novels that he began but could not finish.
      1. Most of these manuscripts were written between 1896 and 1906.
      2. They include “The Enchanted Sea Wilderness,” “The Great Dark,” “Which Was the Dream?” “Which Was It?” “The Refuge of the Derelicts,” and “Three Thousand Years Among the Microbes.”
   B. These fictions return obsessively to a related series of themes that had come to haunt Twain’s imagination:
      1. A happy family is destroyed by a disaster.
      2. An ocean journey goes horribly astray.
      3. A famous celebrity is exposed to shame and humiliation.
   C. Life in these stories is figured by surreal and grotesque settings and events. “Among the Microbes,” for example, is narrated by someone named Huck; he was once a person but has been mysteriously turned into a cholera germ and now voyages through the bloodstream of an alcoholic tramp.

III. Biographers and critics have cited several causes for the bleakness of these stories.
   A. Most obvious are the personal losses that Twain himself sustained during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
      1. His bankruptcy revealed how fragile his financial success was.
      2. The deaths of his eldest daughter, Susy, and his wife, Livy, took from him the two people whom he clearly loved the most.
      3. Livy’s death followed a long, harrowing illness and resulted in deep ruptures between Twain and his other two daughters.
4. In various forms, these events keep recurring in the stories.  

B. For rational and irrational reasons, Twain felt profoundly guilty about these failures and losses, and guilt is a recurring theme of these fictions.  

C. In addition, the stories are often centered on the illusionary quality of fame, the actual emptiness of celebrity status, making it possible to read the stories as Twain’s expression of his alienation from his own public image.  

1. The protagonist of “Which Was the Dream?” is another “Tom,” a war hero on the verge of becoming president (two fates predicted for Tom Sawyer) who discovers how illusionary and insubstantial his glittering heroism was.  

2. Twain’s own fame is depicted as insignificant, too: in an especially poignant moment, Huck (in “Among the Microbes”) vaguely remembers the once-celebrated “Twain—what was his other name? Mike?”  

IV. The other great literary project of this period was Twain’s attempt to write his autobiography. It also remained unfinished, and its failure points to a similar sense of dissociation, of being lost or trapped inside the white suit of his celebrated public image.  

A. By 1907, Twain had written or dictated well over half a million words in this attempt to articulate the meaning of his life.  

B. His declared motive for writing autobiographically continually changed: from getting the facts straight, to telling the truth from beyond the grave through posthumous publication, to finding ways to extend the copyright on his earlier, commercially valuable works.  

C. Although various scholars have published heavily edited versions of the autobiography, what the essentially incoherent and unpublishable heap of manuscript reveals is Clemens’s ultimate inability to recover his self, to disentangle his identity from the never-ending project of performing or enacting a self as “Mark Twain.”  

V. From these failures, at the end of his life, Twain evolved two different compensatory beliefs.  

A. One is the idea, present in his work as early as Connecticut Yankee but given its definitive expression at the end of “The Mysterious Stranger,” yet another unfinished fiction from this last period, that reality is itself unreal, that all is a dream.  

B. The other is an idea that is present in his work from even earlier, from at least Huck Finn, and referred to as “training” in Connecticut Yankee and developed into a pseudo-philosophy in Twain’s last (anonymously) published book, What Is Man? (1909): the idea that any individual’s life is entirely determined by circumstance, that man is merely a machine.  

C. When it was learned, posthumously, that Twain had written What Is Man? there was considerable surprise and some outrage. Such materialist pessimism seemed out of keeping with the reassuring if skeptical humor of the beloved sage. But it is clear that for Twain himself, struggling with the angst-ridden mystery of his own success, there was refuge in the thought that no one is responsible for his or her life—indeed, that life itself only seems to exist.  

Essential Reading:  

Supplementary Reading:  
Hill, Mark Twain: God’s Fool.  

Questions to Consider:  
1. How do Huck floating in the bloodstream of a drunken tramp and Huck floating down the Mississippi River comment on each other?  

2. Do you see examples of Twain’s deterministic philosophy in his earlier works? Hank Morgan talks specifically about “training” in Connecticut Yankee, of course, but what about even earlier? Huck Finn? Innocents Abroad?
Scope: This last lecture begins with the end of Clemens’s life, looking particularly at how the nation mourned his loss and how, in its obituary tributes, America summed up for itself the cultural meaning of his career. It next discusses the remarkable image to which Clemens himself resorted to give his life a shape: Halley’s Comet, which was visible in the earth’s skies in 1835, when he was born, then not again until 1910, when he died. Twain seriously believed that there was a connection between this celestial wanderer and himself, his own extraordinary life as both “superstar” and “mysterious stranger.” Finally, the lecture offers its own considerations about how “Mark Twain” remains a living, complex, and dramatic figure through whose life and work we can gain access to the paradoxes and possibilities of our national life. Although “Mark Twain” never existed except as the invention of Samuel Clemens’s genius and ambition, he embodies much of the best and the worst in American experience.

Outline

I. When Samuel Clemens died in 1910, the national media treated his death as both a major public event and a personal loss for millions of Americans. In obituaries, the press also sought to define the largest meanings of Mark Twain’s achievement.
   
   A. His final illness and funeral ceremonies made the front pages of newspapers across the country.
      
      1. Associated Press stories described each of his last days at Stormfield.
      2. His body was carried from Connecticut to New York City, where it lay in state at the Presbyterian Brick Church, at Fifth Avenue and 37th Street, until 10 p.m. so that “an immense crowd of mourners” could view it.
      3. The body was then taken to Elmira, New York, for burial beside his wife and daughters Susy and Jean.
   
   B. Most papers across the country wrote their own editorial comments on the passing of Mark Twain; these provide a good way to understand the terms on which his contemporaries understood him.
      
      1. Gratitude for his humor is perhaps the most frequently expressed idea.
      2. The commentators emphasize the moral uses to which he put his wit: to expose shams and pretense and to defend the cause of common humanity.
   
   C. Interestingly, although the adjective “American” shows up persistently, each region except the South tends to claim “Mark Twain” as its own native son.
      
      1. The Minneapolis Morning Tribune locates him “in the middle of the country.”
      2. The Spokane Spokesman-Review calls him “an American of such sort as only western pioneer America could create.”
      3. The Hartford Courant says “we of Hartford think of him always as a Hartford man.”
      4. I have not located a Southern paper that identifies him as a Southern writer; the Richmond Times Dispatch, for example, places his life in “the Middle West, where he was born and where he learned so much of men” and in “the East where he lived in later life.”

II. Against these proud claims of kinship, we can set Twain’s own only partly comic belief that he was brought to earth by Halley’s Comet and would be carried away by it as well.
   
   A. He told his biographer that it would be “the greatest disappointment of his life” if he did not “go out with” the comet.
      
      1. It was at its perihelion on 16 November 1835, just two weeks before his birth.
      2. On its return seventy-five years later, it reached its closest point on 20 April 1910, the day before Twain died.
   
   B. He felt a close kinship with this celestial wanderer: both he and the comet were “indefinable freaks” of nature.
   
   C. One thing suggested by this belief of his is how extraordinarily large Clemens’s ambitions were: a mere “star” was not bright or unique enough to serve as the measure of the fame he aspired to. As “Mark Twain,” he came close to realizing that dream.
D. Using this image to give significance to his life and career, however, also reveals the profound sense of estrangement and difference that he must often have felt in relation to the rest of mankind.
   1. The narrator of his travel writings is always an outsider.
   2. Hank Morgan, Pudd’nhead Wilson, the various versions of “The Mysterious Stranger”—many of his other protagonists are also “mysterious strangers,” who find themselves in an alien world.
   3. In the story that he felt compelled to tell so repeatedly about such figures—the story of their quest for attention and love—we can see how hard Twain was prepared to work to belong, to fit in, and to shine among these people with whom he could not recognize his kinship.

III. In the century since his death, Twain’s fame has remained bright, but scholars and biographers have argued about which genre most accurately fits the contours of his dramatic life.
   A. Most would agree with the obituary writers that Twain’s life was one of the great American success stories.
      1. That is how his authorized biographer, Albert Bigelow Paine, described his life.
      2. The consensus of the early twenty-first century is well represented by Louis J. Budd, who sees Twain as the embodiment of what is still best in the American character.
   B. Since the 1920s, there has been a minority view that sees Twain as “overwhelmed by America” (Waldo Frank), a tragic figure whose story embodies the enormous price that our culture exacts of its claimants for wealth and popularity.
      1. Van Wyck Brooks stirred up a great deal of debate in 1920 when he referred to Clemens’s life as The Ordeal of Mark Twain.
      2. The last chapter of Justin Kaplan’s Pulitzer Prize-winning Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain is titled “Whited Sepulchre,” and his interpretation of the life emphasizes how often “Mr. Clemens” felt divided from and trapped inside the public image of “Mark Twain.”
   C. This controversy will almost certainly never be resolved, but as a way of ending, we can note the truth that Twain’s best fiction tells.
      1. Typically, his novels’ protagonists—from Tom Sawyer to David Wilson—see popularity as the means to greatness and happiness.
      2. Most critics and readers, however, would agree that he made his greatest contribution to the world’s literature when speaking through the character of Huck Finn, who hates to be conspicuous, who chooses to “light out for the Territory.”
      3. For both better and worse—worse for him, perhaps, but better for us—Clemens never took that road himself. As “Mark Twain,” he goes on without an ending, to keep helping us define what it means to be American, indeed, what it means to be “somebody.”

Supplementary Reading:
Brooks, The Ordeal of Mark Twain.
Budd, Our Mark Twain.

Questions to Consider:
1. How and where does the figure of the “mysterious stranger” appear in Twain’s works?
2. When you hear the words “Mark Twain,” what images and associations come into your mind?
The principal objection to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* at the time of its publication did not concern race, but the character of Huck, who was seen as a poor role model.

Jim takes Huck, who has been reported dead, to be a ghost.
In *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Hank Morgan brings 19th-century technology and "progress" to the medieval world.
Reprinted from *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, 1st ed., 1889

Hank brings Yankee ingenuity to the medieval joust.
Reprinted from *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, 1st ed., 1889
David "Pudd'nhead" Wilson exposes Roxy's son as a murderer and a racial "impostor."

Following the Equator contained some of Twain's most pointed criticisms of the European powers' imperial pursuits in Australia, India, and Africa.

Reprinted from Following the Equator, 1st ed., 1897
Twain's suggested title page for "3,000 Years Among the Microbes"
Reprinted from Mark Twain: A Biography: Vol. 3, by
Albert Bigelow Paine, 1912
Timeline

1835................................. Samuel Langhorne Clemens born in Florida, Missouri; Halley’s Comet visible in the sky

1839................................. Family moves to Hannibal, Missouri

1847................................. Father dies of pneumonia

1848................................. SC begins working on Hannibal paper as errand boy and printer’s devil

1852................................. “The Dandy Frightening the Squatter,” first nationally published sketch

1853................................. SC goes to St. Louis to work as a typesetter; runs away to New York City to see the World’s Fair

1855................................. SC moves to Keokuk, Iowa, to work in brother Orion’s print shop

1856................................. SC moves to Cincinnati, Ohio, to work as a typesetter

1857................................. SC becomes a “cub,” an apprentice steamboat pilot

1859................................. SC earns pilot’s license; begins work as a St. Louis–New Orleans pilot

1861................................. Civil War begins, halting Mississippi River traffic; SC serves for two weeks in an irregular Confederate unit, then travels to Nevada Territory with Orion

1863................................. SC first uses pseudonym “Mark Twain” as newspaper byline

1864................................. SC works as a reporter in San Francisco

1865................................. MT publishes “Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog” in (New York) Saturday Press; it is reprinted in papers across the nation

1866................................. SC visits the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) as traveling correspondent; MT gives first professional lecture in San Francisco, then tours California and Nevada

1867................................. The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County & Other Sketches published by Twain’s friend Charles Webb—MT later repudiates the volume; MT lectures along the Mississippi River; SC travels in Europe and the Holy Land with the Quaker City excursion

1868–1869........................... MT gives “American Vandal Abroad” lecture tour in East and Midwest

1869................................. MT publishes Innocents Abroad; gives “Our Fellow Savages of the Sandwich Islands” lecture tour in East and Midwest

1870................................. SC marries Olivia Langdon (Livy) in Elmira, New York; couple moves to Buffalo; son Langdon born

1871................................. MT publishes Mark Twain’s Burlesque Autobiography; SC and family move to Hartford

1872................................. MT publishes Roughing It; daughter Olivia Susan (Susy) born; son dies of diphtheria

1873................................. The Gilded Age published; MT’s first novel, co-authored with Charles Dudley Warner

1873–1874........................... MT lectures in England

1874................................. Daughter Clara Langdon born; SC and family move into “Mark Twain House” in Hartford

1875................................. MT publishes “Old Times on the Mississippi” in the Atlantic magazine

1876................................. MT publishes The Adventures of Tom Sawyer
1877................................................ MT gives “Whittier Birthday Dinner Speech”
1878................................................ SC takes family to live in Europe
1879................................................ SC and family return to America; MT gives toast to “The Babies” at reunion banquet of the Army of the Tennessee
1880................................................ MT publishes A Tramp Abroad; daughter Jean Lampton born
1881................................................ SC begins investing in Paige typesetting machine; MT publishes The Prince and the Pauper
1882................................................ SC returns to Mississippi River to collect material for a book
1883................................................ MT publishes Life on the Mississippi
1884................................................ SC creates his own publishing company, Charles L. Webster & Co.
1884–1885...................................... MT’s “Twins of Genius” lecture tour with George Washington Cable
1885................................................ MT publishes Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
1888................................................ Awarded honorary Master of Arts degree by Yale University
1889................................................ MT publishes The Prince and the Pauper
1890................................................ SC’s mother dies in Keokuk; SC attends funeral in Hannibal
1891................................................ Family shuts up Hartford house and moves to Europe
1892................................................ MT publishes Merry Tales and The American Claimant
1894................................................ Webster & Co. fails; SC declares bankruptcy; MT publishes The Tragedy of Pudd’nhead Wilson and the Comedy of Those Extraordinary Twins and Tom Sawyer Abroad
1895–1896...................................... MT’s “Around the World” lecture tour, across northwestern United States, Australia, New Zealand, India, and South Africa
1896................................................ MT publishes Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc and Tom Sawyer, Detective; Susy dies of spinal meningitis
1897................................................ MT publishes Following the Equator
1898................................................ SC finishes repaying his creditors in full; begins writing autobiography
1899................................................ MT publishes “The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg”
1900................................................ Family returns to America and moves to New York City
1901................................................ MT publishes “To the Person Sitting in Darkness”; family moves to Riverdale, New York; MT receives honorary Doctorate of Letters from Yale University
1902................................................ MT receives honorary Doctorate of Laws from the University of Missouri and SC returns to Hannibal and the river for the last time
1903................................................ Family moves to Tarrytown, New York; then sails for Italy
1904................................................ MT begins autobiographical dictations; Livy dies at Florence; SC moves to New York City
1905................................................ MT gives speech at his “Seventieth Birthday Dinner”
1906–1907...................................... MT publishes twenty-five installments of his autobiography in the North American Review; publishes What Is Man? anonymously in a private edition; first wears white suit in winter when testifying in Congress for an international copyright law
1907................................................ MT publishes *Christian Science*; receives honorary Litt.D. from Oxford University

1908................................................ SC moves to Redding, Connecticut; forms “The Mark Twain Company” and trademarks his pseudonym

1909................................................ MT publishes *Is Shakespeare Dead?*; Jean dies of heart failure

1910................................................ Samuel Clemens dies in Redding, Connecticut; Halley’s Comet again visible in the sky
Glossary

**burlesque**: a comic literary technique in which the characteristics of another text or kind of text are imitated and exaggerated in order to deflate and mock the original.

**deadpan**: describes a performance technique in which the speaker’s physical expression remains at odds with the effect his or her words produce on the audience, keeping a straight face, for example, while listeners laugh; it is a live equivalent to some forms of irony.

**determinism**: the philosophical belief that there is no free will, that an individual’s life is entirely the product of various forces beyond his or her control.

**Gilded Age**: the title of Twain’s first full-length fiction (co-authored with Charles Dudley Warner), this term has been appropriated by American historians to describe the decades after the Civil War as a time of pervasive political corruption and economic speculation.

**ideology**: the usually unspoken and unconscious set of values and assumptions by which people in a given society organize and explain reality; Mark Twain referred to this process with the terms “training” and “inherited ideas.”

**irony**: classical rhetoricians distinguish several varieties of irony, but in relation to Mark Twain’s work, the concept most significantly refers to a latent or unspoken meaning in a set of words, a meaning that often contradicts the overt one.

**lyceum system**: a nineteenth-century phenomenon, with clear origins in New England’s habit of listening to sermons and its faith in moral uplift and self-improvement: it brought nationally recruited speakers to city and small-town audiences for lectures on a wide range of topics, from foreign travel to history to reform causes such as temperance.

**parody**: a comic or literary technique closely related to **burlesque**; when a burlesque humorously imitates another writer’s or work’s specific style, it is more often referred to as a parody.

**realism**: the commitment in art to represent life as it actually is lived, unmediated by literary conventions like “hero” and “villain”; in American literature, the term typically refers to the generation of writers that included Mark Twain.

**romance**: in literary criticism, and to a realist like Mark Twain, romance is a mode of writing that idealizes life; Hawthorne defended his right to write romances, whereas to Twain, it was a term of reproach and a subject of much deflationary humor.

**satire**: the use of humor, irony, or exaggeration to arouse indignation at specific ideas, people, institutions, or human nature in general.

**subscription publication**: a mode of selling books through the agency of door-to-door sales, in which subscribers promised to buy a book in advance of its publication on the basis of a sample or prospectus of the book’s contents; the system was widespread in the late nineteenth century, but Mark Twain was the only American author of any renown to use it.

**vernacular**: in literary criticism, this term refers to language derived from ordinary speech and common experience, as opposed to language acquired from other books.
Biographical Notes

“Artemus Ward” (pseudonym of Charles F. Browne, 1834–1867). The best-known American humorist during the 1860s. His comic lectures and travel writings were models for Mark Twain, whom he met and befriended in the Nevada Territory in 1863.

Bixby, Horace (1826–1912). The Mississippi River pilot who, in 1857, took Sam Clemens on as an apprentice, or cub. He is described with great respect as the “lightning pilot” Mr. B---- in “Old Times on the Mississippi” (1875).

Bliss, Elisha (1822–1880). The head of the American Publishing Company, Bliss wrote Mark Twain in 1867 to ask if he was interested in turning his Quaker City newspaper letters into a book. Bliss went on to publish and sell by subscription Twain’s first six major works (1869–1880). Believing Bliss had been defrauding him, Twain broke away from his company in 1880—but after his own publishing company failed, the American Publishing Company, now headed by Bliss’s son Frank, published Twain’s major works during the 1890s.

Cable, George Washington (1844–1925). Regional southern writer and novelist, Cable toured and lectured with Mark Twain in 1884–1885 as one of the “Twins of Genius.” Devoutly Christian and an outspoken critic of the white South’s treatment of freed slaves, Cable both impressed and infuriated the easier-going Twain.

Clemens, Olivia Langdon (1845–1902). The only daughter of Jervis and Olivia Lewis Langdon of Elmira, New York, Livy married Mark Twain in 1870. When Twain went bankrupt in 1894, by sophisticated legal maneuvering, she became his “chief creditor”; throughout the thirty-two years of their marriage, Twain felt deeply indebted to her as a friend and helpmeet.

Clemens, Olivia Susan (1872–1896). Sam and Livy called their oldest child Susy. Her death in Hartford while they were on the “Around the World” lecture tour opened a wound in the family that never healed.

Clemens, Orion (1825–1897). Sam’s older brother whose life story, according to Sam, should have been titled “Autobiography of a Damned Fool.” He played an important role in “Mark Twain’s” career as the person who brought Sam into a print shop and the newspaper business and who took Sam with him to Nevada, but Orion himself failed at a long list of jobs.

Fairbanks, Mary (1828–1898). A fellow traveler on the Quaker City trip, “Mother” Fairbanks (as Twain called her in letters he signed as “Your Prodigal Son”) helped coach Twain at the beginning of his career in how to appeal to a national audience.

Howells, William Dean (1837–1920). A prolific novelist, a prominent editor, and late-nineteenth-century America’s leading advocate for literary realism, Howells met Twain in 1869 after having written a favorable review of Innocents Abroad. For the rest of Twain’s life, Howells served him as a generous friend and advisor.

James, Henry (1843–1916). The “other great writer” of Mark Twain’s generation, James was best known is his time as the author of “Daisy Miller,” and is best known in American literary history for his subtle, ironic, and complex narratives of consciousness confronting reality. He and Twain had many themes in common; stylistically, they were worlds apart.

Mallory, Thomas (1400?–1471). The British knight whose collection of prose tales, Le Morte D’Arthur, largely defined the myth of Camelot and the Round Table for five hundred years.

Paige, James W. Originally from upstate New York, Paige was the inventor who convinced Mark Twain to invest hundreds of thousands of dollars between 1880 and 1894 in his ingenious but finicky and ultimately unmarketable typesetting machine.

Prime, William (1825–1905). The travel writer who published Tent Life in the Holy Land in 1857; in Innocents Abroad, Twain refers to him as “Grimes” and quotes his book as an example of the romanticizing of which most travel writing is guilty.

Rogers, Henry Huddleston (1840–1909). To Twain, whom he helped out of debt and back to prosperity in the 1890s, Rogers was “the best man I have ever known.” To others, who knew him as the Director of Standard Oil, he was one of the “robber barons” of the Gilded Age.
Scott, Walter (1771–1832). As a poet and novelist, he was perhaps the most popular English writer through the nineteenth century. According to Mark Twain, however, who describes the “Sir Walter disease” as an acute susceptibility to the illusions of romance, Scott’s books may have been responsible for the Civil War.

Warner, Charles Dudley (1829–1900). A Hartford newspaper publisher and editor whom Twain met as a neighbor in the Nook Farm community and with whom, on a dare from their wives, he collaborated on The Gilded Age (1873), Twain’s first novel.

Webster, Charles (1851–1891). He married Mark Twain’s niece in 1875 and became Twain’s business agent in 1881. From 1882 to 1888, he headed the publishing company Twain founded. The company had Webster’s name on it, but Twain remained in control.

Whittier, John Greenleaf (1807–1892). Although an abolitionist long before that was a popular position, by 1877, when Twain spoke at his seventieth birthday dinner, Whittier was one of the nation’s most widely read and deeply respected writers.
Bibliography

Essential Readings: Mark Twain's Texts

I recommend the following editions for the specific Twain works we focus on in the lectures.

For almost all the short works we discuss (tales, sketches, speeches, and so on), the single best source is *Mark Twain: Collected Tales, Sketches, Speeches and Essays*, 2 volumes, ed. Louis J. Budd, New York: The Library of America, 1992.

The Library of America has also published *Innocents Abroad* and *Roughing It* and *Mississippi Writings: Tom Sawyer, Life on the Mississippi, Huckleberry Finn and Pudd’nhead Wilson*, both edited by Guy Cardwell. These are reliable editions, but most readers will probably prefer to read Twain’s full-length works in separate books. For them, I recommend getting *Innocents Abroad* and *Pudd’nhead Wilson* as published in *The Oxford Mark Twain* series. This is a collected twenty-six-volume set of Twain’s works, published for the general reader by the Oxford University Press, 1996–1997, under the general editorship of Shelley Fisher Fishkin. The volumes closely follow the texts originally published in Twain’s time and have the great virtue of including the original illustrations.

For the other full-length texts—*Roughing It, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*—I recommend the paperback editions published by the Mark Twain Project under the imprint of the Mark Twain Library (Berkeley: University of California Press). These volumes are handsomely printed and reasonably priced and include not only the original illustrations, but also much of the scholarly annotations prepared by the project’s contributing editors for the ongoing “The Works of Mark Twain” series.

The University of California Press and the Mark Twain Project also publish the best sources for Twain’s late unfinished and unpublished texts, including *The Devil’s Race-Track: Mark Twain’s Great Dark Writings*, ed. John S. Tuckey (1966), a well-chosen sampling of the stories we discuss in Lecture Twenty-Three, and *Mark Twain: The Mysterious Stranger*, ed. William M. Gibson (1970), bringing together all three of the surviving unfinished manuscripts in which, between 1897 and 1908, Twain tried to tell the story of a divine-demonic figure who falls to earth.

As part of its commitment to publishing scholarly editions of the entire mass of written material Mark Twain left us, the Mark Twain Project has to date brought out five extremely well annotated and illustrated (but also expensive) volumes of his voluminous correspondence under the title *Mark Twain’s Letters*. Until this series is complete, you can find many additional letters in six older collections, each organized according to his correspondent: *Mark Twain to Mrs. Fairbanks*, ed. Dixon Wecter (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1949); *Mark Twain’s Letters to His Publishers, 1867–1894*, ed. Hamlin Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press); *The Love Letters of Mark Twain* (letters to Olivia), ed. Dixon Wecter (New York: Harper, 1949); *Selected Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, eds. Anderson, Gibson, and Smith (New York: Atheneum, 1960); *Mark Twain’s Correspondence with Henry Huddleston Rogers*, ed. Lewis Leary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961); and *Mark Twain’s Aquarium: The Samuel Clemens Angelfish Correspondence, 1905–1910*, ed. John Cooley (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991).

For students especially interested in Twain’s live performances, from the full-length lectures to his brief after-dinner toasts, the best source is *Mark Twain Speaking*, ed. Paul Fatout (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1976).

Supplementary Materials: Internet Resources

Although much that is available through the World Wide Web is unreliable, the number of responsibly prepared and permanently archived resources for students and teachers is steadily growing. The following four sites devoted to Twain are the richest and most useful.

“Mark Twain in His Times: An Electronic Archive,” written and directed by Stephen Railton, http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/railton. This is my own site, and it is the location of the “Internet Resources” listed throughout the lectures.

“Mark Twain Quotations, Newspaper Collections, & Related Resources,” by Barbara Schmidt, http://www.twainquotes.com. A great place to look up what Twain said in his often-quoted and -misquoted aphorisms, as well as what he wrote in his newspaper days and what was written about him during his lifetime in the *New York Times*. The site also includes a wonderful collection of pictures of Twain.
“Mark Twain,” by Jim Zwick, http://www.boondocketsnet.com/twainwww. The first major Twain site on-line, and still continuously updated and enlarged, this contains a wide range of materials, from Twain texts to teaching lessons.

“The Mark Twain Papers and Project,” maintained by the Mark Twain Project at the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, http://library.berkeley.edu/BANC/MTP. Includes online exhibits from the wealth of Twain material in its collections.

Supplementary Readings: Selected Criticism

The texts below marked with an asterisk (*) may be hard to find outside libraries, but they are the best places to look to see how “Mark Twain” was defined and redefined during the first half century after his death.

Arac, Jonathan. “Huckleberry Finn” as Idol and Target. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997. A usually thoughtful, occasionally polemic meditation on the role Twain’s novel has played and should play in our culture, especially in our classrooms.


Benson, Ivan. Mark Twain’s Western Years, Together with Hitherto Unreprinted Clemens Items. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1938. Focuses on how Clemens grew as a writer and includes a good sampling of Mark Twain’s Nevada and California newspaper pieces.


*Brooks, Van Wyck. The Ordeal of Mark Twain. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1920. This book dominated the discussion of Twain for about thirty years; it argues that he was a great writer crippled by America’s inferior culture.


———. Mark Twain: Social Philosopher. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1962. Looks at Twain’s ideas about society, politics, and history as they developed over the course of his career.


Chadwick-Joshua, Jocelyn. The Jim Dilemma: Reading Race in Huckleberry Finn. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1998. Addresses the most significant modern concerns raised by the question of teaching Twain’s novel by careful readings of Jim’s representation in the text.


Doyno, Victor A. *Writing “Huck Finn”: Mark Twain’s Creative Process*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991. By a series of close analyses of the portions of the manuscript that were known to exist in 1991, Doyno allows us to watch as Twain’s imagination shaped his story into art.


Ensor, Allison. *Mark Twain and the Bible*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1969. Considers the Bible as the book that exerted the most influence on Twain’s imagination, focusing particularly on the beginning and end of his career.


Fulton, Joe B. *Mark Twain’s Ethical Realism: The Aesthetics of Race, Class and Gender*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997. Through close readings of four novels, this study argues for the moral significance of Twain’s realistic depictions of social differences.


Gillman, Susan. *Dark Twins: Imposture and Identity in Mark Twain’s America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989. Uses the complex relationship between Samuel Clemens and Mark Twain as a starting point for examining Twain’s fascination with various forms of identity—fraudulent, racial, gendered, and so on.


Gribben, Alan. *Mark Twain’s Library: A Reconstruction*. 2 vols. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1980. This well-researched study reveals how much Twain read and how important his reading was to his thought and writing.

Harris, Susan K. *The Courtship of Olivia Langdon and Mark Twain*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Through an analysis of the letters Twain and Livy wrote each other, Harris examines the cultural dynamics of their relationship.

———. *Mark Twain’s Escape from Time: A Study of Patterns and Images*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1982. A reading of how Twain sought to create locations in space and in time (water and childhood, for example) as imaginative escapes from the pressure of reality.

©2002 The Teaching Company Limited Partnership


Howells, William Dean. *My Mark Twain: Reminiscences and Criticisms*. New York: Harper, 1910. Reviews of Twain’s books and an essay on his personality by the literary man whose opinion meant the most to Twain himself.

Kaplan, Justin. *Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966. This Pulitzer Prize-winning book is the best biography of Twain, although it begins when its subject is already thirty years old.


LeMaster, J. R., and James D. Wilson, eds. *The Mark Twain Encyclopedia*. New York: Garland, 1993. With entries on a wide range of people, books, and topics by a distinguished company of Twain scholars, this is a good place to start looking for thoughtful answers to basic questions about Twain.


Lorch, Fred W. *The Trouble Begins at Eight: Mark Twain’s Lecture Tours*. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1968. A scholarly study of where Twain lectured, what he said from the platform, how he said it, and how it was received; includes reconstructions of the texts of his major lectures.


*Lynn, Kenneth S. Mark Twain and Southwest Humor*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1959. Analyzes Twain’s humorous techniques, especially his use of narrative innocence, in the context of the antebellum humorists Clemens read.

Macnaughton, William R. *Mark Twain’s Last Years as a Writer*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1979. This study deliberately avoids using the words “despair” and “obsession” while offering a critical account of Twain’s late, unfinished manuscripts.


Messent, Peter. *The Short Works of Mark Twain: A Critical Study*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001. Messent takes up a neglected topic: the collections of tales and sketches Twain published; with such titles as *Sketches, Old and New* and *Merry Tales*, these books formed a major part of his literary output.

Michelson, Bruce. *Mark Twain on the Loose: A Comic Writer and the American Self*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995. Self-labeled as an “anti-reading of Mark Twain,” this book embraces the signs of anarchy and evasiveness that can help explain why Twain has been such a “hard-to-get-rid-of” image of our national culture.
*Paine, Albert Bigelow. *Mark Twain: A Biography*, 3 volumes. New York: Harper, 1912. Twain made Paine his authorized biographer, Boswell to his Johnson, and in return, Paine carefully preserved the myth of Twain as all-American hero. But his closeness to Twain during the last years of his life gives this book an authority no other biographer can claim.

Petit, Arthur G. *Mark Twain and the South*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1974. One of the few studies of a strangely neglected topic, this explores how Twain’s ideas about region and race were shaped and reshaped during his life.


———. “The Tragedy of Mark Twain, by Pudd’nhead Wilson.” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 56 (2002). Compares the story Twain tells about David Wilson’s rise to popularity with the drama of Twain’s performance for his audience.

Rasmussen, R. Kent. *Mark Twain A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Life and Writings*. New York: Facts on File, 1995. Contains more entries than *The Mark Twain Encyclopedia* and sticks closer to names, dates, and facts; it also includes chapter-by-chapter summaries of many of Twain’s works.


Robinson, Forrest G. *In Bad Faith: The Dynamics of Deception in Mark Twain’s America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986. A perceptive account of the relationship between Twain’s fictions and the “fictions” of American culture, focusing on *Tom Sawyer* and *Huck Finn*.


Sanborn, Margaret. *Mark Twain: The Bachelor Years*. New York: Doubleday, 1990. A popular study of Twain’s experiences along the river and in the west.


*Smith, Henry Nash. *Mark Twain: The Development of a Writer*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962. Smith says his focus is on “the problems of style and structure,” but he treats that and a good deal more in this incisive series of analyses.


©2002 The Teaching Company Limited Partnership
Steinbrink, Jeffrey. *Getting to Be Mark Twain*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991. A biographical and literary study of the years 1868 to 1871, during which Clemens wrote the first two “Mark Twain” books and, Steinbrink argues, established the shape of the “Mark Twain” identity.


Wonham, Henry B. *Mark Twain and the Art of the Tall Tale*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. Traces the history of the tall tale as both rhetorical and cultural performance and looks at how Twain appropriated and revised the conventions of the genre.