

New Directions in Scholarship

Edited with an Introduction by

Laura E. Skandera Trombley and Michael J. Kiskis

Mark Twain and His Circle Series Tom Quirk, Editor



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To my beloved parents, John and Mary Skandera, who taught me laughter is as powerful as love.

Laura E. Skandera Trombley

To the memory of my mother, Frances E. Kiskis, who would be not a little surprised (but nevertheless pleased) that I have managed to make a life reading and writing. As Sam Clemens wrote of his mother, I can say of mine: "Technically speaking, she had no career; but she had a character, and it was of a fine and striking and lovable sort."

Michael J. Kiskis

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Constructing Mark Twain

Introduction

LAURA E. SKANDERA TROMBLEY AND MICHAEL J. KISKIS

I believe that the trade of critic, in literature, music, and the drama, is the most degraded of all trades, and that it has no real value—certainly no large value.... However, let it go. It is the will of God that we must have critics, and missionaries, and congressmen, and humorists, and we must bear the burden.

Mark Twain, Mark Twain's Own Autobiography

If there is such a thing as a nonregulated and free literary marketplace, Samuel L. Clemens–Mark Twain has been and remains one of its hot commodities.¹ Over the past eighty years there has been an avalanche of scholarship about Clemens's life and work. Indeed, if one wishes to become familiar with the body of criticism, the task would take the better part of a decade. The sheer mass of criticism published concerning Clemens (either as primary subject or supporting character) suggests that writing about him has become a rite of passage for the novice and a career capstone for the distinguished scholar-biographer specializing in American literature. Clemens himself, if he were inclined toward honesty, would be taken aback by his ability to conjure an audience, both popular and academic (especially academic), so long after his death. Hundreds of gallons of ink have been spilled in tribute to the writer and to his literary alter ego.

From Clemens's ever-so-careful attempts to use the press to create and fine-tune his public persona to the thousands of pages of academic analysis that have been generated since the early criticism of William Dean Howells

1. Twain, Mark Twain's Own Autobiography, will hereafter be referred to as AU.

and Brander Matthews, Clemens has held a spotlight all his own within American literary studies. That spotlight has rarely, if ever, dimmed. Even if the intensity of the light and angle of the beam have been adjusted by subsequent generations of readers and critics, his reputation has not suffered the typical dark corners that speckle the literary stage—the spirits of Herman Melville, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and T. S. Eliot must all look on with a mixture of awe and chagrin. Clemens himself tried to explain his staying power by claiming that his books were not fine wine for the elite but clear water for the common reader; "everybody," he wrote, "likes water."2 As we have moved through the twentieth century, critics have, in fact, performed the literary equivalent of the miracle at Cana as they have pronounced Clemens's proletarian water among the finest of elite American wines.

Still greater attention will soon be aimed at Clemens: the one hundredth anniversary of his death is now in sight (a mere nine years from this writing). That anniversary is worth pointing to as an indicator of Clemens's staying power. As prelude to what will no doubt be the equivalent to a scholarly frenzy, we thought it especially timely to take an extended look at Clemens's life and work and, perhaps, provide several hints for the major reevaluation that is sure to come. As readers and teachers and commentators on the life and career of Samuel Clemens, we considered it important to reflect on the rapid changes now under way in how we understand Clemens within the confines of his own time as well as his value to our own. Critics have not been shy in their attempts to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct Clemens. He is amazingly plastic, but critics are all too ready to morph him to suit their purposes. They—we—dab him with color and stretch his figure using our own interpretive prism. We are deliberately pausing here for a moment to wonder what he would think of all this and to identify and judge our complicity in the continuing work to transport Clemens so completely and so intimately (and, at times, so inappropriately) into our own time. We are now at a point where the accumulation and breadth of scholarly interpretation compel us to look back over the territory that has been explored to see how our own ideas have been shaped by the work

Of course, Clemens's fecundity as a writer remains at the center of our work. The sheer volume of his writing urges us to recalibrate his value as a contributor to American life and culture. He was, in all, a supremely confident author who used the whole range of life as his pallet. We are still coming to terms with his range, with the expanse of his thinking and reactions, with his successes and failures, and with his abilities, inabilities, and biases as we read his work and read for its connection to his life. No doubt, and in significant measure because of his mongrel and plastic nature, American culture has adopted Clemens as a premier spokesperson; his commentary is constantly adopted and freely adapted to fit our needs. As apprentice or expert marketers, some critics have been and are shameless, in fact, in how quickly they co-opt him as sage or huckster, often with a dismaying sloppiness, and disconnect Clemens from his own time in order to grasp him firmly as our contemporary, as one of us, and to embed him within the shocks and quakes of our time. As we prepared this collection of essays, we shuddered to imagine how soon advances in computer animation will treat us to a walking, talking Clemens shilling (what else!) cigars and scotch, reducing him to what he and his family feared the most—a mere caricature. Indeed, although Clemens has been dead for ninety years, in some fairly significant ways one scarcely notices it. Impersonators roam the countryside performing Mark Twain before schoolchildren, paying audiences, and gatherings of scholars. New editions of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn are continually being published along with scholarly volumes of his letters. New films are under production, and two documentaries of his life are in the pre- and postproduction stages. Scholars gather at conferences and endlessly argue about Clemens's life, legacy, and sometimes even his literature. The weary traveler can spend the night at the Huck Finn Motel and relax while watching Twain visit the folks on Bonanza or Star Trek and snacking on Mark Twain macadamia nuts. In New Orleans the Mark Twain Pizzeria features Twain gazing through the glass front window-Mark Twain and pizza? The same traveler can pack clothes in luggage endorsed by Twain's

of our predecessors. That foundation built of past scholarship gives us a clearer view of what is in store for the future of Twain studies. It also suggests that there is a good deal of meaning still in the notion of a community of writers and its influence on creating an identity (both for its subject and for itself).

great-great-nephew (an impostor), and even pay their bills with Mark Twain cyber bucks issued by the Mark Twain Bank.

But perhaps it is not as bad as all that. There is a strength at the center of Clemens's character, a strength that assigned him an essential poise as events and ideas swirled around him. His was an essentially modern consciousness that reveled in and was repelled by change. He was keenly sensitive to the mutability of life and the play of ideas that affect national or cultural definition. He understood that a culture is not a collection of immutable artifacts (literary or otherwise) but a dynamic conversation that courses within, through, and around those artifacts. Clemens would, we believe, agree that R. W. B. Lewis had it just right in his preface to *The American Adam:*

[A] culture achieves identity not so much through the ascendancy of one particular set of convictions as through the emergence of its peculiar and distinctive dialogue. (Similarly, a culture is on the decline when it submits to intellectual martial law, and fresh understanding is denied in a denial of further controversy.) Intellectual history, properly conducted, exposes not only the dominant ideas of a period, or of a nation, but more important, the dominant clashes of ideas. Or to put it more austerely: the historian looks not only for the major terms of discourse, but also for major pairs of opposed terms which, by their very opposition, carry discourse forward. The historian looks, too, for the coloration or discoloration of ideas received from the sometimes bruising contact of opposites.³

Clemens might have thought of himself as such an historian. He talked of such a "bruising contact of opposites" years earlier as he described his autobiographical method, "a form and method whereby the past and the present are constantly brought face to face, resulting in contrasts which newly fire up the interest all along, like contact of flint with steel" (AU, 3).

The contact that Clemens generated as he composed his fiction or as he re-created his life grew out of a sustained effort to place characters as well as himself at odds with others and with the very communities and times in which they and he lived. In an innately dialogic vision, he saw himself as an outsider (perhaps as the quintessential or iconic outsider) and his writings, ultimately, as artifacts, as composites of the ideas and trends and values accumulated from the society with and within which he traveled. The tension and conversation that resulted from the clash of ideas and perspectives were tinder for the fire of his imagination. And despite the still too often categorizing of Clemens as funny man, the reality is that he pushed active interpretation, not passive entertainment; in a variation of the call and response, he presented many of his stories in forms that left the final reaction and response open to his readers. They too, demanded Clemens, must participate in the dialogue.

In all, Clemens was both a participant in and an instigator of the dialogue that is recognized as American culture. His novels, stories, travel writings, essays, letters, quips, and maxims are, at the very least, a multilayered monologue that inspires and exhorts comment. Clemens swam in the current of his increasingly modern culture by reading and writing. And, like him, we swim in the currents of his and our cultures by reading and writing—about him. Like him, we engage in a supremely self-conscious act: we read and write in order to find some tie to the world around us, something that takes us to a new understanding of ourselves and takes us to a deeper appreciation of the aesthetic and ethical demands that are placed upon us by our own lives. We explore and create culture to make sense of the world; Clemens's writings and his life offer seemingly inexhaustible resources for such prospecting. He provides an array of materials most useful to our own work of cultural alchemy.

As alchemists, then, we read and interpret and write. Hence, this collection. Surely, some will yawn or exclaim and complain, "No! Not another edition of essays on Mark Twain! What more can be said?" That complaint is more than likely seasoned with assumptions about Samuel Clemens—Mark Twain as established literary and cultural icon and about unwavering allegiance to critical precedent. Our intention, instead, is to treat Clemens and established critical ideas with a dash of skepticism and with a sense, so

^{3.} Lewis, The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century, 2.

valuable to our understanding, of the ways we shape and reshape, use and (perhaps) abuse icons. Not challenging the scholarship that created the icon suggests an unwillingness to reconsider the history of critical traditions and the way those traditions have been and are tied to time-bound perspectives, beliefs, agendas, and biases. Icons—even secular icons—simplify mystery and solidify certainty. Protecting them displays a reluctance to plane the gilt off the public image to find the complexity of the human being that is the kernel of the image.

This work of literary carpentry is the drive behind this series of essays. Typical analogies of restoration or reclamation do not fit here. Both intimate a return to some original state or pristine condition, an unaffected, untarnished, untrammeled image. To think that possible with an immensely complicated Samuel Clemens and his potent ego-supplement Mark Twain turns away from the weight of biographical and literary material that has come our way during the past century. This is especially true of the post-World War II years in which Twain studies flourished as part of a movement to ensure the dominance of U.S. culture and during the last decade of the cultural wars that has seen the firings of multiple canons, each aimed at shaking the literary status quo. Participants in both movements are often unwilling to admit that each has been highly selective, perhaps even exclusionary, in their approach to Clemens. One of the basic tenets of writing is that authors choose what they put in or leave out of their story. Even granting the progress in locating new biographical evidence, the narrative produced by writers and scholars about Samuel Clemens has been marked by its creators' recurring predilection to include or exclude (or ignore or misrepresent) often pertinent bits and pieces of his life and times. Worse has been a seemingly deliberate (though never fully or consciously admitted) push to practice pathography. It is one thing to remove the gilt to see the man; it is another thing to toss gobs of agenda-laden muck with the hope of forging a critical and literary identity not for the subject but for the biographer and critic.

Until recently, studies of Samuel Clemens have offered incomplete renderings of important areas of his life and, at times, simplistic formulas of how his life and times and relationships influenced his writing. For example, one area that has been virtually ignored until the publication of *Mark Twain in the Company of Women* has been the pivotal influence, indeed formative

influence, of the women surrounding Clemens and, perhaps even more important, his wife, Olivia Langdon.⁴ Also, questions of Clemens's approach to family life have taken on new power as scholars have come to see personal context as a valuable source for insights into Clemens's creativity. Few recent observers see Clemens's talent as unaffected by, as standing firm against, the microsociety of family or the macrosociety of nineteenth-century America. Biographical evidence can also lead to a reassessment of Clemens's literary ties to the domestic fiction of the nineteenth century. Still another example is the dominance of the Clemens-Twain personality split in the critical tradition. Biographers have long accepted the notion of a division within Clemens—the question, once oversimplified to allow an easier categorization, became who was Samuel Clemens and who was Mark Twain and how do we tell the difference? Again, until recently, there has been no clear explanation of why (or even if) such a dichotomy exists, and we have come to wonder whether such a dichotomy was present in the historical Clemens (which becomes at times a quest like that for the historical Jesus) or whether it is a product of the critical interpretations handed down to us in an ongoing attempt to atomize a complex personality into pieces more easily categorized and then described. Certainly, the fault in such work—if we decide to concentrate on fault at all—grows out of the critical and cultural perspectives that have influenced such studies. Reflecting on the sequence of scholarship on Clemens-Twain can help us all better understand our own place in the critical parade. Critics do not work in a vacuum. Samuel Clemens did not. None of us do.

There has been, fortunately, a move in some recent scholarship to complicate our understanding of Clemens, especially as questions related to race and gender and class have become more pronounced. As we move further away from the times within which Clemens lived and wrote, we are better able to gain needed perspective on the myriad influences that shaped him as a man and writer. Such has been the case in work that has begun to unpack the generative power of Clemens's literary and personal associations: What voices did he hear? What voices did he tend? How did those voices blend into his fiction and into his life? We are also more apt to hear questions

^{4.} Skandera Trombley, Mark Twain in the Company of Women. Hereafter referred to as MTW.

related to Clemens's legacy and to the symbiosis between that legacy and the evolution of critical traditions. There is an expanding critical interest in placing Clemens within a broad scheme of literary influences, influences that suggest he is not so much the end product of one specific literary tradition (for example, the literary humor of the old Southwest) but a hybrid shaped by a multivocal, multiracial, and cross-gendered consortium of male and female writers. Such questions should prompt us to interrogate how the tradition of critical judgment on Clemens has been influenced as individual critics work within paradigms contemporary to their own working lives.

All of this leads to a more complex understanding of Clemens: a complexity that demonstrates that simplified dichotomies manage only to obscure human personalities and relationships. Clemens's personality has never been thought simple; his relationships (all of them) were nothing if not complex. And the relationship between him and the critics and commentators who have worked off of his life and writings remains among the most complex of all. Over the past ten years there has been a flurry of biographies and critical studies of Samuel Clemens. In one sense this activity can be seen as generational, a new crop of junior faculty working their way to tenure and choosing Clemens as their topic. This, though, is unusual in today's academic climate: studies of individual authors have fallen out of critical favor and have been set aside for the involved and theoretical maze of broad cultural studies. Interestingly, work in Clemens-Twain has, in fact, become an entry for solid work that blends the tradition of the singleauthor study with contemporary cultural and theory-based criticism. Such work deserves closer reading and considerable contemplation. Because of it Clemens has emerged as a contested literary icon. Indeed, it is possible to read recent and various studies and biographies as texts that test the limits of theory and the boundaries of the canon. It appears that we are experiencing a Kuhn-like paradigm shift here: the new supplants the old; the skepticism that informs new approaches displaces or at least rattles the steel tradition. This critical equivalent to Clemens's autobiographical contact of "flint to steel" crosses generations. To put it more directly, Clemens's life and works are being inscribed both by those who come recently from graduate school and by those who have lifelong investments in the figure they have, in many cases, helped to create. The essays chosen for this collection underscore the strains and shifts within the epistemology of criticism that focuses on

Samuel Clemens. In 1974 Hamlin Hill, in his incendiary essay "Who Killed Mark Twain?" identified the areas of Twain scholarship he thought had been neglected and called for "spice and flavor, zestful prose, scholarly self-respect, and the courage to offer untraditional perspectives on [Mark Twain's] life and works." We believe the essays selected here provide the qualities Hill deemed essential and in sum represent a generation's work in Twain studies.

The collection opens with two essays that place Samuel Clemens-Mark Twain immediately within a domestic scene. Michael J. Kiskis sets the stage by discussing Twain's ties to the "Other American Tradition," namely, literary domesticity. Using examples from Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, "The Death of Jean," and the Autobiography, Kiskis interprets these disparate texts as evidence of Twain's concern with familial relationships. In Kiskis's view Twain consistently chose the home as the location to debate issues of morality. Vic Doyno wrestles with the issue of defining Twain's success as paterfamilias in his illuminating essay, "Samuel Clemens as Family Man and Father." Noting that nineteenth-century norms are decidedly different from contemporary ones, Doyno discusses Twain's parents as well as his middle-child placement within the family. He also points out Twain's interest in family dynamics and parental discipline. On a related topic, the role Mary Mason Fairbanks played in guiding the development of Twain's social skills and, more critically, his writing is thoughtfully investigated in J. D. Stahl's "'To his preferred friends he revealed his true character': Mary Mason Fairbanks's Disguised Debate with Sam Clemens." Fairbanks, a professional writer for the Cleveland Herald, was an active and equal participant in Twain's role playing and consented to the "game of mutual self-creation." Stahl notes that Fairbanks's role in Twain's development was wrongly minimized by earlier critics because of the movement to reject any "domesticating influence," that is, literary domesticity.

Mark Twain's creation of himself as a writer is the subject of Jeffrey Steinbrink's and Robert Sattelmeyer's essays. In "Mark Twain's Mechanical Marvels," Steinbrink demonstrates how Twain's love of technology was a lifelong obsession that influenced his "construction of mechanistic metaphors

^{5.} Hill, "Who Killed Mark Twain?"

for the creative process." He follows the influence of technology on Twain's writing process from The Innocents Abroad to the Autobiography. Robert Sattelmeyer traces Twain's prose distortions of his early life in "Steamboats, Cocaine, and Paper Money: Mark Twain Rewriting Himself." In "The Turning Point of My Life," Twain shatters the myth of a bucolic boyhood that he in part, Sattelmeyer argues, helped create. Twain's rewriting late in life was to try to make sense of his present circumstances, circumstances that contained a "darkening vision of human nature." Twain's later writings are also featured in Jennifer L. Zaccara's "Mark Twain, Isabel Lyon, and the 'Talking Cure': Negotiating Nostalgia and Nihilism in the Autobiography." Zaccara recognizes Twain's penchant for working throughout his writing career in an autobiographical mode, yet she views this writing as a precursor for the kind of experimentation he would attempt when he turned to his autobiography. She connects Twain's dictations with the popular "talking cure," a method espoused by the emerging psychological movement. Zaccara contends that Isabel Lyon's role in the "cure" was to assist Twain in his dictations by serving as his warm-up audience and acting as his "pseudoanalyst."

Several contributors have written provocative essays dealing with questions of ethnicity and race within Twain's works. Twain's "problematic" turn-of-the-century writings are the focus of Henry B. Wonham's "Minstrel and the Detective: The Functions of Ethnic Caricature in Mark Twain's Writings of the 1890s." Wonham views the rise of racial stereotyping during this period as affecting Twain's writing in the sense that despite trying to resist the prevailing culture, his "ethnic caricatures . . . dismantle the paradox of Jim's complex identity." Jim Leonard's "Huck, Jim, and the 'Black-and-White' Fallacy" finds Twain's use of logic in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn highlighted when writing about racial issues. Naturally, Huck's decision to "go to hell" is featured, as is the "logically fallacious structure" that forms the basis for Huck's decision. The ways in which Twain includes logical fallacies in the narrative, Leonard claims, deconstructs the "black-and-white" "false dilemma." David L. Smith contends, in "Humor, Sentimentality, and Mark Twain's Black Characters," that one of the most controversial issues in Twain criticism has been the interpretation of representations of race. To assist in framing his discussion, Smith reviews Tom Quirk's Coming to Grips with Huckleberry Finn as well as his own earlier publication "Huck, Jim, and

American Racial Discourse" and Shelley Fisher Fishkin's Was Huck Black? Twain's use of dialect, Smith argues, provides readers with more than "sociolinguistic verisimilitude," and exchanges about dialect are by their nature "politically charged." Ann Ryan takes issue with critics and popular culture in her essay, "Black Genes and White Lies: Twain and the Romance of Race." She examines Jonathan Arac's view that Adventures of Huckleberry Finn enjoys a misbegotten reputation as an iconic American novel examining race. The text is not to blame for this deification, Ryan argues; instead we need to examine America's penchant for interpreting the narrative as a tale of how racism was resolved.

Questions of space and metaphor come to the fore in Tom Quirk's "Mark Twain in Large and Small: The Infinite and the Infinitesimal in Twain's Late Writing" and John Bird's "Mark Twain Studies and the Myth of Metaphor." Quirk ventures that one of Twain's strengths was his willingness to become lost. The concept of a limitless space, instead of frightening Twain, appeared to intrigue him and served as the subject for his essay "Was the World Made for Man?" Twain was also fascinated with the infinitesimal and wrote about it, most notably in "Three Thousand Years among the Microbes." Quirk observes that in his examination of the infinite and infinitesimal, "Twain extended the reach of his fundamentally democratic imagination outward to the fringes of the universe and inward to a single-celled world." Bird looks to the imagination and metaphor building that critics have undertaken as he revisits the book-length critical studies published over the past ten years. He relies on the theories of Colin Turbayne and Roman Jakobson to assist him in identifying the ideas present in Twain scholarship (the metaphor of twinness comes immediately to mind). Bird's intention is to predict the future direction of Twain studies by revealing "some of its distortions, past and present."

Finally, a direct reply to Hill's essay and a status quo check comes from Laura E. Skandera Trombley and Gary Scharnhorst in their piece, "'Who Killed Mark Twain?' Long Live Samuel Clemens!" Trombley and Scharnhorst comment on whether Hill was justified in his attack on Twain critics and identify recently published works that have, at times substantially, challenged well-established approaches to Clemens-Twain and that have pushed the boundaries of the field.

In the end, a change in theory or perspective or emphasis does more

than alter scholarship about Clemens-Twain; it has the potential to change significantly the figure, the man, the icon, the canon, the text. There is much at stake here for scholars: reputations have been built on particular interpretations, and that prior scholarship has been used, at times, to claim exclusive prospecting rights. Who will stake a lasting claim for the Samuel Clemens of the coming century, and what theoretical perspective(s) will dominate? To whom will Clemens belong? But scholars are not the only ones who have a stake in Samuel Clemens. The broad population of interested readers also has a claim, and the criticism published today will shape public perceptions. The symbiosis between reader and critic has always played a role in the public conception of Clemens-Twain. How will future readers come to know him? Will they gaze on the icon or come to understand the man? Which icon? Which man? This collection confronts these questions and offers a series of observations that point to riches still to be mined by twenty-first-century readers.

Mark Twain and the Tradition of Literary Domesticity

MICHAEL J. KISKIS

When I ask students what they know about Mark Twain, they invariably respond with a host of established images—white suit, white hair, frontier born and raised, westerner, southerner, the river. Many have read either The Adventures of Tom Sawyer or Adventures of Huckleberry Finn; few have moved beyond the party line of Twain as American classic. Fewer still know him as the author of The Prince and the Pauper or Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc; some have been touched by the controversy of race and have come to see the debate over racism in his works as the only issue worthy of attention or scorn; all tend to think that he emerged fully formed amid Mississippi sandbars and small towns constrained by solid family and community values. All are surprised by his attachment to his family.

For a good long time, Twain scholars, like my students, have been operating within exclusionary readings and tightly wrapped and carefully marketed icons. When I was introduced to Mark Twain's writing in 1981 during my first semester of doctoral study, the theme of the seminar was Mark Twain as Artist (emphasis, in fact, on failed artist). That focus on and interpretation of Twain were clearly tied to the debate begun more than sixty years earlier by Van Wyck Brooks and Bernard DeVoto: the two camps divide over Twain as frustrated and failed artist (Brooks) or Twain as essential proponent of American individualism and of the innate power of the vernacular and folk mind (DeVoto). Twain studies is still held hostage to that debate.

The relative ease of an interpretation based in such dualism has created a cottage industry in Twain studies. We continue to squeeze and mold Twain into prepackaged notions of who and what he was or should be—we apply

current theoretical approaches and constructs to his works in a display of intellectual gymnastics rather than a concentrated and open-minded exploration. We do not often admit that the prism through which we read Twain conjures specific images and interpretations. Though we make noises about understanding the affect of interpretive paradigms on our work, we do not always view those paradigms with a skepticism that allows entry to opposing views or that allows us to appreciate a more (or less) complex understanding of Twain's humanity. It is a classic case of what Annette Kolodny describes as the challenge facing feminist scholars: "Insofar as we are taught how to read, what we engage are not texts but paradigms." My point is that for too long we have kept to one interpretive paradigm when reading the works of Mark Twain. We have focused mainly on his supposedly unambiguous support for individual—even iconoclastic—freedom.

In her introduction to *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America*, Gillian Brown argues that we need to complicate our reading of American literature by blending the mythic criticism that focuses on the growth of a peculiarly American individualism (which takes explicit form with Emerson) with an understanding of nineteenth-century American women writers' focus on domestic images and experiences of home and hearth that they used both to challenge a market controlled by male writers and to build their own literary tradition:

Individualism and domesticity have both long figured as thematics of nineteenth-century American culture, but as distinct and oppositional trajectories. Thus two disparate literary movements seem to emerge in the 1850s: on the one hand the American Renaissance, represented by the "classic works" of Emerson, Whitman, Hawthorne, Melville, and Poe; and on the other hand the Other American Renaissance, inscribed in the works of Stowe and such writers as Susan Warner, Fanny Fern, Harriet Wilson, and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps.

This gender division has persisted with remarkable neatness and clarity throughout American literary criticism. Recall how myths of the origins of American culture describe second-generation Adamic and oedipal stories: new Edens, sons in exile, estrangement from

women. . . . In this androcentric, if not misogynistic, account of American culture, literature records the battle between the masculine desire for freedom and the feminine will toward civilization: the runaway Huck Finn versus the "sivilizing" Widow Douglas. The paradigm of the dreamer's flight from the shrew defines the domestic as a pole from which the individual must escape in order to establish and preserve his identity. Huck lights out for the territory in order to avoid what Ann Douglas calls "the feminization of American culture," to flee from the widow's sentimental values that epitomize, in Henry Nash Smith's words, "an ethos of conformity." 2

Brown begins a useful reappraisal of the validity of parallel literary movements. She also points to a way to set Mark Twain and his literary creations within a much broader and, I think, more accurate tradition in American letters. Taking Brown's comments as my lead, I intend to examine Twain's tie to the "Other American tradition" of literary domesticity—to the definition of home, the boundaries of home, and the freedom to be gained by belonging. Mark Twain never wanted to escape the "domestic"; in fact, his identity depended heavily upon values embedded in home and hearth. For evidence, I will look to *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, "The Death of Jean," and the *Autobiography*.

My experience as a reader of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn during the past fifteen years has introduced me to a variety of critical judgments ranging from the complaints against Huck's obstinate ignorance to a celebration of his archetypal quest for freedom, to applause for his ability to transcend both religious and racial prejudice, to disappointment with the final third of his story, to a sophisticated response to the final adventures that argues for the unified whole. It fascinates me that each of these approaches is still in play; none has been effectively calmed. I now have a sense that we have recently turned a critical corner and face still another—and compelling—approach: the next interpretive battle may be over Huck's influence on how we see and understand family relationships.

This places Adventures of Huckleberry Finn at the center of the swirl over domestic concerns in the mid- to late nineteenth century. Huck's runaway

^{1.} Kolodny, "Dancing through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice, and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism," 280.

^{2.} Brown, Domestic Individualism, 5. Hereafter referred to as DI.

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status, his being essentially an orphan, places him at the side of young Ellen Montgomery of Susan Warner's Wide, Wide World (1850), Sylvy of Sarah Orne Jewett's "White Heron" (1886), or, later, even young Lily of Mary Wilkins Freeman's "Old Woman Magoun" (1891). These writers place their characters in a struggle for moral action—most often within households and communities shaped, perhaps exclusively, by women. In our own time, Huck is placed within the drive by social conservatives to highlight William Bennett's praise for supposedly conservative-owned virtues—Selfdiscipline, Compassion, Responsibility, Friendship, Work, Courage, Perseverance, Honesty, Loyalty, and Faith-and for stories that speak "without hesitation, without embarrassment, to the inner part of the individual, to the moral sense."3

Twain, I think, would be ambivalent. He saw the moral sense as no key to appropriate behavior; it is too easily shaped by external authority, too quickly transformed from an interest in compassion into the slave of a conscience like that which Twain's narrator battles in "The Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut," or like that which Huck battles as he runs for his life. Yet, issues of morality are deeply embedded in Twain's domestic fiction, especially the question of how to teach morality—by the voice of authority or by the resilience of tradition. In Adventures of Huckleberry Finn the debate is manifest in the conflict between the narrow blasts of Miss Watson and Pap on one side and the steady perseverance of the Widow Douglas and Jim on the other.

Twain insisted that the arena for this consideration of morality is the home. I recently taught a graduate class called "Mark Twain and Social Justice." Our discussion of the constellation of social issues in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn quickly focused on the profound absence of the "traditional" family and social networks within the tale. As we worked through Twain's writings, one student became more apprehensive: finally, looking very uncomfortable, he announced that he felt that he would have substantial problems bringing Adventures of Huckleberry Finn to his students. The questions of aesthetics were not the problem, nor did he feel the questions of race insurmountable. His prime concern became how to introduce a story

about an abused child of an alcoholic parent to a group of students whose home lives were so much a mirror image of Huck's. "This story," he said, "is too close to their real lives." Twain's consideration of home—or absence of home—fostered his uncanny ability to look into the dark corners of human life and paint a picture that may, in fact, be more accurate in 2000 than it was in 1886 or 1846.

Clearly, just as the increased consciousness of civil rights since the 1950s inspired readers to consider the role that race plays in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, our contemporary concerns ignite questions related to family issues, social and legal protections, and values. Consider that the new judge brought in to rule on the matter of Huck's custody (a battle between Pap and Judge Thatcher and the Widow Douglas) decides in Pap's favor based on an assumption that biology trumps compassion and overrides legal protection: "[H]e said courts mustn't interfere and separate families if they could help it; said he'd druther not take a child away from its father. So Judge Thatcher and the widow had to quit the business."4 Four paragraphs later, however, that new judge is full of regrets after Pap's short-lived reform and "reckoned a body could reform the old man with a shot-gun, maybe, but he didn't know no other way" (Case, 49). The whole next chapter (chapter 6) presents a haunting picture of an abduction, frequent cowhidings and beatings ("But by-and-by pap got too handy with his hick'ry, and I couldn't stand it. I was all over welts"), psychological abuse, and, most troubling of all, attempted murder and Huck's contemplation of patricide:

By-and-by he rolled out an jumped up on his feet looking wild, and he see me and went for me. He chased me round and round the place, with a clasp-knife, calling me the Angel of Death and saying he would kill me and then I couldn't come for him no more. I begged and told him I was only Huck, and he laughed such a screechy laugh, and roared and cussed, and kept on chasing me up. Once when I turned short and dodged under his arm he made a grab and got me by the jacket between my shoulders, and I thought I was gone; but I slid out of the jacket quick as lightning, and saved myself. Pretty soon he was all tired out, and dropped down with his back against

^{3.} Bennett, ed., The Book of Virtues: A Treasury of Moral Stories, 14.

^{4.} Twain, "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn": A Case Study in Critical Controversy, 48. Hereafter referred to as Case.

the door, and said he would rest a minute and then kill me. He put his knife under him, and said he would sleep and get strong, and then he would see who was who.

So he dozed off, pretty soon. By-and-by I got the old split-bottom chair and clumb up, as easy as I could, not to make any noise, and got down the gun. I slipped the ramrod down it to make sure it was loaded, and then I laid it across the turnip barrel, pointing towards pap, and set down behind it to wait for him to stir. And how slow and still the time did drag along. (*Case*, 54–55)

The choreography and pacing of the scene inspire terror. The experience itself motivates Huck to get the hell away. The disagreeable idea of being dragged from place to place by Pap to avoid another custody battle is replaced with a deliberate choice of homelessness and wandering and, what is worse for Huck, loneliness.

All of this takes place prior to Huck's coming upon Jim on Jackson's Island. Whether that reunion is part of Twain's initial plan or not (Vic Doyno has suggested that it was not part of Twain's early intention), the first seven chapters offer troubling images of an adolescent struggling at the furthest margins of small-town life. Huck's character is set. His actions and reactions for the rest of the tale remain consistent with what we know from these first episodes. We know that Huck, as the child of an alcoholic, as a young boy torn between loyalty and fear, as a student of violence and loneliness, will do what he can to survive, to get along. He will be reactive not proactive. He will allow others to set the agenda (even his stories take their cue from the individuals he meets) and will choose to remain quiet: his refrain, whether to Miss Watson's complaints or to the later felonies of the Duke and King, is to keep still; speaking up "would only make trouble, and wouldn't do no good" (Case, 33). Huck's behavior in the final section of the tale is consistent, which, in fact, helps to resolve at least part of the critical discomfort generated by Huck's reluctance to challenge Tom Sawyer's crazy actions toward Jim.

What, then, does the story offer if its teller's primary consistency is expedient behavior and reactions sparked by fear? At its heart, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is the story of two survivors, each of whom is reluctant to act alone or to speak out: both Huck and Jim, though for different reasons, are robbed of their options and of their voices by the social system

that reigns over them. Only when they are separated from that system are they able to consider choices and offer even tentative commentary on their lives; only when they loosen themselves from the constraints are they able to talk. And it takes a good deal of time before they can talk to each other on a human level rather than through the disguises they inherit from their social caste. (Compare, for example, Huck's attempt to explain the French language [chapter 14] to Jim to the later exchange after their separation in the fog when Huck is shamed into apologizing to Jim [chapter 15] or, still later, Jim's story about his deaf daughter [chapter 23].) Their increasingly intimate talk reinforces both their alienation from the society at large and, perhaps more important, their exile from any semblance of family.

And where does that lead us? If the whole of Huck's story is about the disintegration of human bonds and the eventual breakdown of even the most tentative of human connections, we will have grave problems making a case for its value as a moral tale. Adventures of Huckleberry Finn presents us with nagging questions: How do we deal with the dizzying array of possible—and very often ambiguous—lessons that push through the narrative? Do we pick and choose to make the text more palatable as moral instruction? Do we, for example, opt for an optimistic interpretation in order to demonstrate that Huck, in the end, has managed to grow into a critical but loyal member of the society? Do we present his rejection of society—all society—at the end of the novel when he decides to "light out for the Territory ahead of the rest" in order to escape the community to which he has recently returned as a positive step? Is self-exile an option to be applauded? Has his experience made him more or less suspicious of allegiances—not to mention relationships with other individuals or groups? After all, staying very much in character, Huck decides to turn and run rather than confront the demands of community membership. He runs from the possibility of family. He turns to irresponsibility with relish and anticipation. That is not a moral lesson.

I would like to make a different argument. The key to the immorality of Huck's tale is not in *his* slouching toward irresponsibility and expediency but in *our* own ease in ignoring the whole of Huck's life or (worse) cheapening it with a condescending chuckle and a quickened step so that we push him from our view. Perhaps we decide that he gains sensitivity because it is safer for us if he does so. Huck, after all, is the homeless child on the street. The immigrant shut out from our schools. The child who,

because of a self-destructive belief in his own corruption and worthlessness, grows up to be his pap. Mark Twain's moral lesson is *not* that Huck gains a sense of his own humanity by transcending the constraints and stereotypes placed on him and on Jim by the authority of school and church and home but that Huck fails. The stout heart does not win over the deformed conscience. Huck's failure is our lesson. Midpoint in the composing process, Mark Twain added the admonishment that "persons attempting to find a moral . . . will be banished" (*Case*, 27). Huck tried. And he was banished. Huck—and Mark Twain, and Samuel Clemens—left a story to us steeped in domestic concerns in the hopes that we would come to understand the primacy of home and the value of compassion.

Compassion is, however, a difficult emotion to pin on Mark Twain. At least it has been that way within our established interpretive paradigm. After our look at Twain's building a case for compassion in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, let's turn now to his autobiographical writing to consider an even more profound description of the value of human relation.

In December 1909, Mark Twain penned what he called "the final chapter of my autobiography." The essay, published posthumously in 1911 as "The Death of Jean," has received only quick mention by biographers and has been passed off as highly sentimentalized, yet it is one of the more affective pieces in Twain's canon (frankly, I have found no piece so likely to destroy conventional notions of Mark Twain). Critics have been content to slip the piece among those works considered extraordinary not because it hints at a genuine domestic foundation in Twain's emotional life (though this is a valuable and neglected aspect of Twain's life and writing) but because it does not conform to established, comfortable ideas of Twain as misanthropic social philosopher. It challenges the established paradigm and is, therefore, relegated to the ash heap of sentimentalism. Mark Twain, it seems, is not allowed to express real and troubling emotion. And we, as critics, are made uncomfortable by that emotion and must look away before we admit that Twain had (and maybe that we have) an emotional life.

Some biographical background may be helpful here. In the summer of 1909, Jean Clemens, Twain's youngest daughter, arrived in Redding, Connecticut, to rejoin the Clemens household (to reconstitute that household may be a more accurate description since Clara would marry in October and later move to Europe). The aging Twain, who by this time had watched

the procession of the dead as a genuinely interested bystander, was pleased with the potential for reconnecting with Jean, who had been shuttled back and forth between a maze of sanatoriums and cures since her diagnosis with epilepsy in the 1890s. Their relationship had been a difficult one. And while all Twain's relationships were difficult, none bore so tragic a tint as those with his children.

With a potential reconciliation in sight, Jean dies on the morning of Christmas Eve. She seems to have suffered a seizure and drowned in her bath. She is found by the household's servant, Katy Leary. Twain begins:

Jean is dead!

Has anyone ever tried to put upon paper all the little happenings connected with a dear one—happenings of the twenty-four hours preceding the sudden and unexpected death of that dear one? Would a book contain them? Would two books contain them? I think not. They pour into the mind in a flood. They are little things that have been always happening every day, and were always so unimportant and easily forgettable before—but now! Now, how different! how precious they are, how dear, how unforgettable, how pathetic, how sacred, how clothed with dignity! (AU, 245–46)

Twain's calm is extremely affective here. Throughout his career he was haunted by a tendency to burlesque and melodramatic pathos at moments of personal stress; however, here there are no histrionics, no melodramatic expression of grief. The grief is there. And it is deep. But it is present not in the specific experience of Jean's death but in the catalog of deaths that Twain creates as he replays his past:

In England thirteen years ago, my wife and I were stabbed to the heart with a cablegram which said, "Susy was mercifully released today." I had to send a like shock to Clara, in Berlin, this morning. . . .

I lost Susy thirteen years ago; I lost her mother—her incomparable mother!—five and a half years ago; Clara has gone away to life in Europe; and now I have lost Jean. How poor I am, who was once so rich! Seven months ago Mr. Rogers died—one of the best friends I ever had, and the nearest perfect, as a man and a gentleman, I have ever yet met among my race; within the last six weeks Gilder has