A close-up portrait of Mark Twain, showing his characteristic wild, white hair and a thick, grey mustache. He is wearing a dark brown, textured jacket over a white shirt and a dark tie. The background is a plain, light grey color.

**THE
MODERN
SCHOLAR**
GREAT PROFESSORS TEACHING YOU!

**The Life and Times
of Mark Twain**

Professor Michael Shelden
Indiana State University

The Life and Times of Mark Twain

Professor Michael Shelden
Indiana State University



Recorded Books™ is a trademark of
Recorded Books, LLC. All rights reserved.

The Life and Times of Mark Twain
Professor Michael Shelden



Executive Editor
Donna F. Carnahan

RECORDING

Producer - David Markowitz
Director - Ian McCulloch
Podcast Host - Gretta Cohn

COURSE GUIDE

Editor - James Gallagher
Design - Edward White

Lecture content ©2010 by Michael Shelden
Course guide ©2010 by Recorded Books, LLC

©2010 by Recorded Books, LLC

Cover image: Digitally color enhanced photograph of Mark Twain, 1895
and a Currier & Ives print, "On the River;" ca. 1889, © Library of Congress

#UT168 ISBN: 978-1-4498-0448-0

All beliefs and opinions expressed in this audio/video program and accompanying course guide are those of the author and not of Recorded Books, LLC, or its employees.

Course Syllabus

The Life and Times of Mark Twain

About Your Professor	4
Introduction	5
Lecture 1 The Boy and the Wilderness, 1835–1853	6
Lecture 2 Mastering the River, 1857–1861	11
Lecture 3 Becoming Mark Twain, 1861–1866	15
Lecture 4 A Literary Bonanza, 1867–1869	19
Lecture 5 The Gilded Age, 1869–1875	23
Lecture 6 The Poet of Childhood, 1876–1880	27
Lecture 7 Family Man, 1880–1883	31
Lecture 8 A River Runs Through It, 1884–1885	36
Lecture 9 The Wizard of Hartford, 1886–1890	41
Lecture 10 Going for Broke, 1891–1895	45
Lecture 11 Death and the Maiden, 1896–1899	49
Lecture 12 The Most Famous Man in America, 1900–1905	53
Lecture 13 Man in White, 1906–1907	58
Lecture 14 The Grand Farewell, 1908–1910	62
A Mark Twain Timeline	67
Adaptations	69
Course Materials	71



About Your Professor

Michael Shelden

Born in Oklahoma, Michael Shelden earned his Ph.D. in English from Indiana University in 1979. He then began teaching at nearby Indiana State University, where he was promoted to Professor of English in 1989, and where he remains a full-time member of the faculty. For ten years he was a fiction critic for the *Baltimore Sun*, and from 1995 to 2007 he was a features writer for the *Daily Telegraph* of London, where he contributed dozens of articles on notable figures in film, literature, and music, including one of the last interviews with actor Christopher Reeve. Shelden is married and the father of two daughters.

Shelden's first book, *George Orwell: Ten Animal Farm Letters to His Agent, Leonard Moore* (1984), was an edited collection drawn from letters Shelden found at the Lilly Library (Indiana University, Bloomington). In 1989, he published his literary history *Friends of Promise: Cyril Connolly and the World of Horizon*, which covered the decade of the 1940s, when *Horizon* was the most influential literary magazine in the United Kingdom. The book was based on a large collection of Connolly's personal papers at the University of Tulsa, and on interviews with the magazine's former editors and assistants, including Stephen Spender.

Authorized by the George Orwell estate, Shelden's biography of Orwell (*Orwell: The Authorized Biography*) was published in 1991 and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Biography. Among other things, the book included the first detailed account of Orwell's controversial list of people whom he considered politically dishonest and unreliable in British society.

Shelden's biography of Graham Greene appeared in a United Kingdom edition in 1994 under the title *Graham Greene: The Man Within*. In 1995 it was published in the United States, with revisions, as *Graham Greene: The Enemy Within*, and its "despoiling" portrait of Greene as a driven and devious artist provoked heated debate on both sides of the Atlantic.

Introduction

In this course we will follow Mark Twain's progress from a village dreamer in his youth to a national hero in his old age. Our study of his life and times will take us from one end of the American continent to the other, and will begin in its heartland on the banks of its mightiest river when the republic was young and the frontier was vast. At the end of our course, we will have followed Samuel L. Clemens from the Mississippi River to the mining camps of California and Nevada—where he began his writing career under the pseudonym of Mark Twain—and then onward to the great cities of the Eastern United States, where he made his fame and fortune in the Gilded Age. At journey's end we will have circled the earth with the world's most famous writer as he puts the finishing touches on a career that produced such enduring works as *Roughing It*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *Life on the Mississippi*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*.



Mark Twain is the first truly American writer. He knew intimately the manners and regional dialects of the Midwest, the Deep South, the Far West, New England, and the Middle Atlantic states. He dined with Boston Brahmins, walked the crowded streets of Manhattan, swapped tall tales with rugged prospectors in the Old West, conversed in broken German with the immigrants in Cincinnati and St. Louis, ridiculed the senatorial windbags in the nation's capital, and listened in amazement to the babble of dialects in the republic's most cosmopolitan city, New Orleans.

In his books, he consciously fashioned a voice and a character capable of capturing the look and sound of an emerging world in all its raw, brutal magnificence. The style is casual, conversational, deceptively simple, and seemingly spontaneous. In imitation of the big river he knew so well, Twain appears to let his words flow where they please, his thoughts wandering from one thing to the next, free and easy. He can talk about anything, everything, and nothing. But the force of his genius is always at work, like a hidden current, guiding his sentences in the right direction and offering surprises at nearly every bend.

Three prominent American authors born in the twilight of the nineteenth century—T.S. Eliot, William Faulkner, and Ernest Hemingway—have recognized Mark Twain's place as a pivotal figure in American culture. A keen student of languages, T.S. Eliot paid Twain a high compliment when he wrote that the novelist's style in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* marks "an innovation, a new discovery in the English language." Faulkner called him "the father of American literature." And Hemingway famously remarked that "all modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*." Each of these writers, who were so different as individuals, had no trouble seeing that Mark Twain was a great literary pioneer, opening a wide path for every American writer who came after him.

Lecture I

The Boy and the Wilderness, 1835–1853

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Mark Twain's *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*, edited by Charles Neider.

Samuel Clemens was born about one hundred miles north of St. Louis in a little Missouri village called Florida. The place was a primitive frontier outpost—two dozen families living in rough cabins, a church that also served as a school, a couple of grist mills, a sawmill, a general store, and two or three small-scale whiskey distilleries. But the residents expected big things. The surrounding land was fertile, and the nearby Salt River held the promise of wealth as a gateway from the interior to the steamboat landings along the Mississippi.

Sam's father—John Marshall Clemens—was a country lawyer and tradesman who dreamed of striking it rich if the Salt River ever began to flow with barges full of the agricultural and mineral resources of the new state of Missouri. But when Sam was born, Mr. Clemens was so poor he was living in a two-room cabin with his wife, Jane, and their four children. The birth of their next child—Sam—was expected in early 1836, but the baby arrived two months premature on November 30, 1835, looking painfully small and fragile.

Jane feared that her child was too weak to live. Her husband probably shared some of her fears, but seems to have felt more optimistic about the boy's future. He named him after his father, Samuel B. Clemens of Virginia, and chose as a middle name that of a friend from his youth—another Virginian called Langhorne. And so the infant whose health was poor entered the world as Samuel Langhorne Clemens. In old age Mark Twain remarked of his birth, "Missouri was an unknown new state, and needed attractions."

Mark Twain Birthplace

In this early twentieth-century photo, an unidentified man stands on the rough plank porch of the Florida, Missouri, cabin in which Samuel Clemens was born. The building now resides inside a museum that is part of the Mark Twain Birthplace State Historic Site.



Gradually, young Sam's health improved, especially after the family moved thirty miles away from their obscure village to the town of Hannibal on the banks of the Mississippi. The boy was only four at the time. Mr. Clemens never achieved prosperity, but the move into town worked wonders on the imagination of young Sam, whose childhood adventures in Hannibal would inspire some of Mark Twain's best stories.

From a very early age, Sam enjoyed living adventurously in the woods beyond the town and along the riverbank. He hunted snakes, explored caves, swam in deep waters, and attempted risky stunts on rocky heights and in slippery treetops. A favorite pastime was playing on tree swings made of hickory bark, which had a habit of breaking when the rider was high in the air. In old age Twain maximized the height and the injuries. The swings, he exaggerated, "usually broke when a child was forty feet in the air, and this was why so many bones had to be mended every year."

He was a popular boy in the town and made friends with children of all kinds—from the respectable daughters of good families to the poor sons of local misfits. In the first group was Laura Hawkins, a neighbor whom Sam idolized for her charm and innocence, and who later inspired the creation of Tom Sawyer's girl, Becky Thatcher. In the second group was Tom Blankenship, a "kindly young heathen" who was the son of the town drunkard. The model for Huck Finn, he was envied by other boys in town because he always did as he pleased and was, Twain remembered, "the only really independent person—boy or man—in the community."

It is easy to romanticize Hannibal as a haven for childhood fun, but Twain knew that it had its share of civic corruption and petty crime, and that on occasion it could be a violent place. When he was ten, a murder took place near his home that involved one neighbor shooting another. The young boy watched the victim die with "the great family Bible spread open on the profane old man's breast." The incident became the basis for Colonel Sherburn's murder of the alcoholic Boggs in *Huckleberry Finn*.

"The proverb says that Providence protects children and idiots. This is really true. I know because I have tested it."

~Mark Twain,
Autobiography of Mark Twain, 1924



© Clipart.com

Life was often a painful struggle in Hannibal, as the Clemens family discovered when its breadwinner died in 1847. Sam was just eleven when he lost his father, to whom he was never close. His mother—an intelligent, warm-hearted woman—struggled to make ends meet. Only a year after his father’s death, the boy had to leave school and seek work. He found a job as an apprentice at a local newspaper, where he began his long love affair with the printed word.

The worst thing about Missouri in Sam’s youth was its acceptance of slavery. In the 1840s the state had eighty thousand slaves (one-eighth of its total population), and a harsh system of discipline kept most of them from daring to rebel or run away. Disobedient slaves were punished with thirty or forty lashes and, for any black person accused of murder or rape, the usual result was a swift and horrible execution. In 1843, a crowd of two thousand people turned out in Columbia, Missouri, to witness the hanging of a black woman convicted of killing her master. The town’s population was only eight hundred, but slaves were brought to the event from miles around to show them the price of disobedience.

Like most people in his part of the world, young Sam was taught that slavery conformed to the laws of both man and God. “In that day,” Twain said of his youth, “for a man to speak out openly and proclaim himself an enemy of Negro slavery was simply to proclaim himself a madman. For he was blaspheming against the holiest thing known to a Missourian, and could not be in his right mind.” In his travel book *Following the Equator*, Twain recalls an incident from his childhood in which he saw an innocent black man murdered. His comments show how the institution of slavery corrupted the moral sense of everyone in his society:

When I was ten years old I saw a man fling a lump of iron-ore at a slave-man in anger for merely doing something awkwardly—as if that were a crime. It bounded from the man’s skull, and the man fell and never spoke again. He was dead in an hour. I knew the man had a right to kill his slave if he wanted to, and yet it seemed a pitiful thing and somehow wrong, though why wrong I was not deep enough to explain if I had been asked to do it. Nobody in the village approved of that murder, but of course no one said much about it.



© Library of Congress

Printer’s Apprentice

The earliest-known photograph of Samuel Clemens taken while he was a printer’s apprentice, age 14. The buckle of his belt spelling out his first name, “SAM,” is made from printer’s blocks.

In a society so tied to slave labor, almost every citizen was an accomplice to the abuses that human bondage encouraged. Unfortunately, the slave's value as property made it convenient to place economics above compassion—as is powerfully demonstrated in the cruel treatment of Miss Watson's slave Jim in *Huckleberry Finn*. The economics of slavery were not all that favorable in Missouri, where there were no huge plantations, but the state's small farmers could not bring themselves to cut their connection to an inefficient system they had brought to this new land from old slave states like Kentucky and Virginia. In its insidious way, the system diminished the freedom even of those who believed they were its masters. As Ralph Waldo Emerson observed, "If you put a chain around the neck of a slave, the other end fastens itself around your own."

One slave who Sam knew especially well was an older man who worked for a relative of the Clemens family. The strongest and best worker on the farm, Daniel was eventually rewarded with his freedom. When he was fifty, in 1855, Daniel was the subject of a legal document in which his owner agreed to "absolve and release" his "faithful servant . . . from the bonds of servitude & slavery both for myself [and] my heirs."

Sam knew Daniel best in the 1840s, when he was an impressive figure in his late thirties, a strong man of integrity and kindness. He made a valuable companion for a young boy whose own father was aloof and laconic. The gentle companionship between boy and man—one white, the other black—became the enduring fact that glowed in Twain's mature imagination and inspired the creation of Jim in *Huckleberry Finn*.

Near the end of his career Twain paid tribute to Daniel's influence, saying that their relationship had continued in spirit long after their paths had diverged in life:

I have not seen him for more than half a century, and yet spiritually I have had his welcome company a good part of that time and have staged him in books under his own name and as "Jim," and carted him all around—to Hannibal, [and] down the Mississippi on a raft.



Huckleberry Finn and Jim on their raft, from an 1884 edition of *Huckleberry Finn*.

Public domain courtesy of Project Gutenberg

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. Why did the boys of Hannibal envy Tom Blankenship, who was the model for Huck Finn?
2. What kind of apprenticeship did Samuel Clemens undertake in his boyhood?
3. How bad was the slave system in Missouri when Samuel Clemens lived there?

Suggested Reading

Twain, Mark. *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*. Ed. Charles Neider. New York: Harper Perennial, 2000 (1990).

Other Books of Interest

Dempsey, Terrell. *Searching for Jim: Slavery in Sam Clemens's World*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003.

Wecter, Dixon. *Sam Clemens of Hannibal: The Formative Years of America's Great Indigenous Writer*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961 (1952).

Websites of Interest

1. *Mark Twain Birthplace State Historic Site* website provides information on the Mark Twain State Park. — <http://www.mostateparks.com/twainsite.htm>
2. Mark Twain Boyhood Home & Museum in Hannibal, Missouri, comprises Twain's childhood home and several other buildings important in his life. The website features genealogical information, educational material, and a schedule of events and exhibits. — <http://www.marktwainmuseum.org>

Lecture 2

Mastering the River, 1857–1861

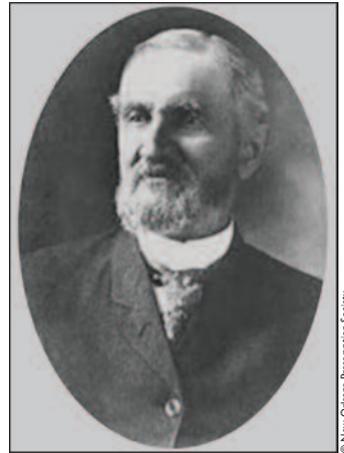
The Suggested Reading for this lecture is **Albert Bigelow Paine’s *Mark Twain, a Biography: Volume I, Part I: 1835–1866.***

With three steamboats coming and going every day in Hannibal during his youth, Sam Clemens developed an early fascination for these mighty craft and the crews who took them up and down the river in all kinds of weather, in daylight and darkness. “When I was a boy,” Twain wrote in *Life on the Mississippi*, “there was but one permanent ambition among my comrades in our village on the west bank of the Mississippi River. That was, to be a steamboatman.” He achieved his ambition in 1857 after first spending a few years in the printing trade. Horace Bixby, a legendary figure on the river, gave him his big break, agreeing to accept him as an apprentice pilot on a steamboat traveling from New Orleans to St. Louis.

“When I say I’ll learn a man the river, I mean it,” Bixby vowed. “And you can depend on it, I’ll learn him or kill him.” There were times when his young pupil, then only twenty-one, may have thought the job would kill him. He was tempted to quit more than once, especially when his mistakes brought a shower of criticism down on him from his demanding boss. It took Sam two years to earn his pilot’s license, and during that time Bixby drove him relentlessly to master the perilous task of steering a big boat through the turbulent waters of the Mississippi.

When Sam was overcome with exasperation one day and despaired of ever navigating the twists and turns of the river after dark, Bixby taught him the important lesson that he could steer at night in the same way “that you follow a hall at home in the dark . . . because you know the shape of it.” Like writing, piloting was an imaginative act. You observed the river closely, and then used those observations to create another river in your imagination. “Steer by the shape that’s in your head,” commanded Bixby, “and never mind the one that’s before your eyes.”

With his background as a printer, Sam found it easier to understand the river if he thought of it as a book that he was both reading and composing in his head. “The face of the water, in time, became a wonderful book,” he

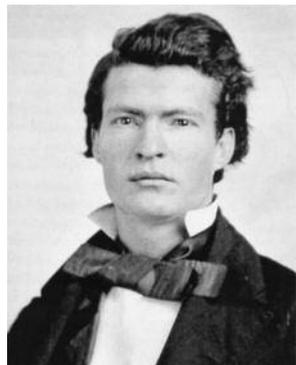


Horace Bixby, ca. 1890
(1826–1912)

© New Orleans Preservation Society

recalls in *Life on the Mississippi*. “And it was not a book to be read once and thrown aside, for it had a new story to tell every day. Throughout the long twelve hundred miles there was never a page that was void of interest.”

On the river Sam came of age, gaining confidence in his abilities and acquiring an invaluable introduction to the great diversity of human life. It was his college. He learned not only the science of piloting, but also how to take the measure of the many men and women who flocked to the river from all parts of the world. Some came to revel in the freedom of frontier life, some to undermine and corrupt it. He saw the worst and best in humanity, from exuberant pioneers to cynical confidence men. He was not exaggerating when he remarked: “When I find a well-drawn character in fiction or biography, I generally take a warm personal interest in him, for the reason that I have known him before—met him on the river.”



© Library of Congress

Cub Pilot

A photograph of Samuel Clemens ca. 1856–57 just as he began learning how to pilot a steamboat.

“A pilot, in those days, was the only unfettered and entirely independent human being that lived on the earth.”

~Mark Twain,
Life on the Mississippi, 1883



© The Mariners' Museum, Newport News, VA

Samuel Clemens steamboat pilot's certificate dated April 9, 1859.



An illustration by Charles Mitchell for the 1883 U.S. edition of *Life on the Mississippi*.

Public domain, courtesy of Project Gutenberg

After he had become a fully qualified steamboat pilot and was put in charge of his own vessel, Sam discovered that his job was just about the best work he could have found. By law, a pilot answered to no one after the boat left the riverbank. His every command had to be obeyed promptly, for the safety of all aboard was in his hands. Such autonomy delighted Sam, who liked to think of himself as a benevolent prince of the river, steering his boat expertly and basking in the admiration of his passengers.

"I loved the profession far better than any I followed since," he wrote in middle age. "I took a measureless pride in it."

Horace Bixby continued working as a riverboat pilot until he was in his eighties, at the beginning of the twentieth century. Sam Clemens might also have stayed in the profession that long, but something important happened in 1861 that caused him to make a sudden change of plans. In April, the Civil War broke out, halting steamboat traffic on the Mississippi. Unable to work, Sam was in no mood to wait around for the river to open up again. He went home to Hannibal and tried to find something else to occupy him.

The first thing that came his way was a chance to serve in the state militia. It has sometimes been said that he joined a Confederate outfit, but officially he was a member of the Missouri State Guard, and Missouri wasn't in the Confederacy. In fact, he was part of a ragtag group of volunteers whose only job was to keep order in the state, but whose very existence was a threat to Federal forces determined to stop slaveholders and other Confederate sympathizers from taking control of Missouri. An order was issued for all guardsmen to surrender their arms. After about two weeks of camping out in the woods and trying to avoid any contact with Union soldiers, Sam's unit disbanded. The former steamboat pilot was glad to be a civilian again, and later admitted that his military service primarily involved hiding out. "I knew more about retreating than the man who invented retreating," he confessed.

Having no taste for battle, he decided to get as far away as he could from the fighting that would soon be raging in the East. His older brother, Orion, was a staunch Union man and also a friend of Edward Bates, the new attorney general in Abraham Lincoln's administration. When Bates secured a post for Orion Clemens as secretary of the new Territory of Nevada, Sam agreed to accompany his brother on the long journey west. After four years of living and working on the Mississippi, he said farewell to the river, boarded a stagecoach with Orion in St. Joseph, Missouri, and traveled in dusty discomfort for three weeks to Carson City, the little territorial capital of Nevada.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. How did Samuel Clemens learn to steer a steamboat in the dark?
2. Why could his time on the river be considered Samuel Clemens's college years?
3. Why did Samuel Clemens's career as a steamboat pilot come to an end?

Suggested Reading

Paine, Albert Bigelow. *Mark Twain, a Biography: Volume I, Part I: 1835–1866*.
Memphis: General Books LLC, 2010 (1912).

Other Books of Interest

Twain, Mark. *Life on the Mississippi*. Intro. Jonathan Raban. New York: Library of America, 2009.

Websites of Interest

1. The University of California Berkeley Bancroft Library's *The Mississippi River* website provides images, notebooks, and memorabilia associated with Mark Twain's time on and writing about the Mississippi River. —
<http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/Exhibits/MTP/mississippi.html>
2. The *Steamboat Times* website features a pictorial history of the Mississippi steamboating era and includes sections on Samuel Clemens. —
<http://steamboattimes.com/index.html>

Lecture 3

Becoming Mark Twain, 1861–1866

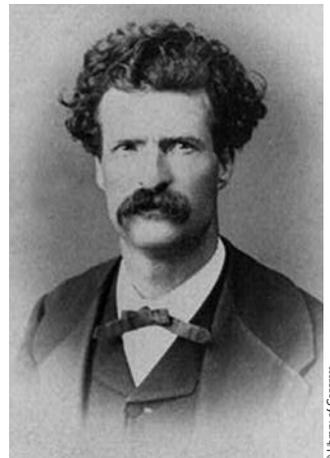
The Suggested Reading for this lecture is *Mark Twain's Collected Tales, Sketches, Speeches & Essays, Volume I: 1852–1890*.

Bored by the bureaucratic business of governing Nevada, and unimpressed by the sand and sagebrush that occupied much of Carson City, Sam Clemens launched a new career as a gold and silver prospector in the vast Humboldt and Esmeralda regions of the state. He dreamed of striking it rich, but made little money from his efforts over a period of several months in 1861–1862. Just when he was beginning to think that he was wasting his time in the West, he made a discovery that would eventually earn him a fortune. He found a deep seam of literary gold in the creation of Mark Twain, the pseudonym he chose for himself after he joined the staff of Nevada's most important newspaper, the *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*.

Some of the locals believed the pseudonym was an inside joke about Sam's habit of buying at least two drinks on credit every time he visited a saloon where the owner marked the debt on a chalkboard. Supposedly, "mark twain" were Sam's usual parting words to the barkeeper. If so, it was also a joke on the locals, most of whom wouldn't have known that "mark twain" was a river term to indicate a depth of twelve feet. As a steamboat pilot, Sam heard it often and attached special significance to it.

He never forgot the feeling of apprehension when the current was less than twelve feet deep, and the "deck-hands who used to heave the lead for me and send up on the still night air the 'six—feet—scant!' that made me shudder, and the 'M-a-r-k—twain!' that took the shudder away."

Whatever its source, the new name caught on, earning the writer many friends, and also a good number of enemies. From the start, Twain had a fondness for stirring up trouble by misleading credulous readers with false stories told in earnest. A good example of this approach can be found in his article "A Bloody Massacre Near Carson," which reported that a swindled investor in a California company had murdered his wife and children before turning a knife on himself. The fact that the investor was able to ride into



Newspaperman Mark Twain in 1867.

town with his “throat cut from ear to ear” was only one of several clues that the story was a hoax, but the details of the case were so sensational—including a reference to the man scalping his wife—that most readers couldn’t resist the temptation to believe every word. The story was widely reprinted in the West, but when Twain admitted he had lied in order to draw attention to the problem of bogus investments, the general reaction was outrage.

Simmering with resentment, the editor of a San Francisco paper urged the *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise* to fire its irresponsible reporter: “We are not fond of hoaxing our readers, and hereby give the *Enterprise* notice that as long as they keep the author of that hoax in their employ we shall not trouble their columns for news matter.”

Twain’s editors—who shared his irreverent attitudes—stood by him, but things went from bad to worse as the mischievous writer continued to irritate readers by making jokes at their expense. By early 1864, some of them wanted to face him in a duel. Alarmed, Twain slipped out of Virginia City and fled to the relative safety of San Francisco.

He found work as a reporter in California, but his reputation as a troublemaker followed him, and soon he made new enemies, including some powerful ones among the San Francisco police, whom he criticized for corruption and abuse of Chinese workers. He lost his job and became despondent when no one else would hire him. As he later remarked of this period, “For two months my sole occupation was avoiding acquaintances; for during that time I did not earn a penny . . . I felt meaner, and lowlier and more despicable than the worms.”

In this mood, the fledgling writer almost abandoned his career. During the wet winter months of 1864–1865 he turned again to mining, digging for gold in Calaveras County, about one hundred fifty miles east of San Francisco. He didn’t find much gold in the ground, but he did improve his literary prospects when he put on paper a story he had heard in the mining camps. After it was sent back East, the manuscript found favor with an editor who

“I thoroughly disapprove of duels. I consider them unwise and I know they are dangerous. Also, sinful. If a man should challenge me, I would take him kindly and forgivingly by the hand and lead him to a quiet retired spot and kill him.”

~Mark Twain,
Autobiography of Mark Twain, 1924



© Clipart.com

published it in New York in late 1865 as “Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog.”

A fellow miner recalled that when Twain was working on the story, he vowed that it would be such a success that the frog “will jump around the world.” He was right. Under various titles, his comic yarn about that jumping amphibian of Calaveras County brought Mark Twain attention throughout America and beyond. Coming out just after the end of the Civil War, the folksy tale of isolated miners gambling on leaping frogs was the kind of lighthearted entertainment war-weary readers craved.

In the year that followed this first taste of literary success, Twain was able to resume his work as a journalist. A newspaper in Sacramento commissioned him to write a series of travel letters from Hawaii (or the Sandwich Islands, as it was then known), and he rose to the challenge by sending back reports that were both informative and funny. His stay there, which lasted four months, allowed him the time to develop his deadpan delivery.



An original drawing from Mark Twain's collection *Sketches New and Old* (1882), in which “The Jumping Frog” was published.

Public domain courtesy of Project Gutenberg



A cartoon from the period showing Mark Twain lecturing about his visit to Hawaii.

“I observed a bevy of nude native young ladies bathing in the sea,” he wrote of one memorable experience, “and went and sat down on their clothes to keep them from being stolen.”

His humorous look at an exotic land earned him a large following in California, and when he returned to San Francisco, he made the most of his experiences by renting a hall and lecturing about Hawaii. Admission was fifty cents, and the time was announced with the provocative line, “The Trouble to begin at eight o’clock.” With his engaging drawl and smooth comic delivery, he received a warm welcome and went on to appear on several stages in California and Nevada.

Having discovered a winning combination in the dual part of showman and writer, he couldn’t wait to conquer larger crowds back East. Shortly after turning thirty-one, near the end of 1866, he sailed from San Francisco on a voyage that would take him to New York and soon transform him into a national celebrity.

Public domain courtesy of Project Gutenberg

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What is the origin of the pseudonym “Mark Twain”?
2. Why did Mark Twain think that his jumping frog would “jump around the world”?
3. Why was Mark Twain challenged to a duel?

Suggested Reading

Twain, Mark. *Collected Tales, Sketches, Speeches & Essays, Volume I: 1852–1890*. Ed. Louis J. Budd. New York: Library of America, 1992.

Other Books of Interest

Paine, Albert Bigelow. *Mark Twain, a Biography: Volume I, Part I: 1835–1866*. Memphis: General Books LLC, 2010 (1912).

Websites of Interest

1. The *Territorial Enterprise Foundation* website features Mark Twain’s works while employed for the *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*. The website includes anecdotes from the author’s life in Nevada. —
<http://www.territorial-enterprise.com>
2. Mark Twain’s “A Bloody Massacre Near Carson City” is available on the *Territorial Enterprise Foundation* website. —
<http://www.territorial-enterprise.com/massacre.htm>

Lecture 4

A Literary Bonanza, 1867–1869

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Mark Twain's *The Innocents Abroad*.

Like many of the legendary figures of his era, Twain was a self-taught genius and learned early in life what American success requires. At the beginning of his career, he summed up the key factor in one word: “Discovery! . . . To give birth to an idea—to discover a great thought—an intellectual nugget, right under the dust of a field that many a brain plow had gone over before. To find a new planet, to invent a new hinge, to find a way to make the lightnings carry your messages. To be the first—that is the idea.”

Life out West had taught him these lessons. In the boom-and-bust culture of Nevada and California, he had seen the importance of staking a claim and working it hard. And the dream of striking it rich with one big discovery never lost its hold on his imagination. During his time as a miner and journalist in Nevada, he had known some of the millionaires who had made their fortunes from the abundant mineral wealth of the Comstock Lode, and had watched enviously as their mining shares skyrocketed. As he acknowledged in old age, “That great Bonanza occupies a rather prominent place in my mind.”

Of course, Twain found his own great Bonanza in the literary inventions that flowed from his pen. Though his success came relatively quickly, it was not that of a lucky backwoods journalist who learned to exploit a literary gimmick or trend. He had a professional man's pride in his hard-won skills and thought that every writer should serve an arduous apprenticeship just as he had done in his other lines of work. “Every man,” he wrote, “must learn his trade—not pick it up. . . . The apprentice-hand, in black-smithing, in medicine, in literature, in everything, is a thing that can't be hidden. It always shows.”

His own apprenticeship as a journalist taught him to respect both the power of language and its limits. Twain, the sharp-eyed reporter, knew that mere words often fail to convey the essence of an experience. “Words are only painted fire,” he said; “a look is the fire itself.” All that a writer can do, he argued, is to seize the best possible words, keeping in mind that “the difference between the almost-right word



An original drawing from Mark Twain's *Roughing It* (1872).

& the right word is really a large matter—it's the difference between the lightning-bug & the lightning.”

Behind the folksy exterior of Mark Twain was a sophisticated intelligence with a wide knowledge based on independent reading and considerable practical experience. He was rarely without a book, even in his steamboating days, and sought out libraries wherever he went. When he launched his triumphant assault on the American literary marketplace, European writing and European writers were still the dominant influence. The most celebrated American orators followed the rhetorical patterns of ancient Rome, and imitated the high tone of eighteenth-century English parliamentarians and the florid manner of Victorian English actors. The leading essayist of the time, Ralph Waldo Emerson, looked to Thomas Carlyle for inspiration. Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe immersed themselves in the dark mysteries of the past. But Twain understood that a shift was taking place which would thrust American English into the forefront of languages and leave British English at a disadvantage. “There is no such thing as ‘the Queen’s English,’” he exulted. “The property has gone into the hands of a joint stock company and we own the bulk of the shares!”

As a result of his background and training, Twain was in a perfect position to overhaul American literature and set it on a new course. Yet he often showed a lack of faith in his literary potential, especially in the early stages of his career. As a struggling young writer, he complained that he couldn’t make enough money from his work to realize his wish of marrying and settling down. “I am as good an economist as anybody,” he wrote, “but I can’t turn an inkstand into Aladdin’s lamp.” Despite his doubts, this is exactly the trick he pulled off a little later, when he conjured nearly two hundred thousand words out of that inkstand and brought forth his first major book, *The Innocents Abroad*, which was a spectacular success and earned a small fortune.

The book had its origin in New York after Twain arrived there from California in 1867. An adventurous group of high-minded Americans wanted to explore Europe and the Holy Land together on a long cruise in a leased steamer—the *Quaker City*—and Twain managed to secure a place on their trip as a travel correspondent for some American newspapers. Restless as ever, and always on the lookout for his next big chance, he left on the voyage only six months after arriving in New York from the West Coast.

In the letters he sent back to the press, which became the basis for *The Innocents Abroad*, he took great pleasure in turning the old-fashioned notion of the Grand Tour on its head, making fun of the uncritical attitude toward the Old World that conventional travelers usually held. It was a declaration of literary independence, with Twain promising to show the reader how “to see Europe . . . if he looked at [it] with his own eyes instead of the eyes of those who had traveled in those countries before him.”

In a tone that is playfully irreverent, Twain brings all the monumental grandeur of the Old World down to his own level so that he can judge it by the practical

standards of the New World. From this viewpoint, parts of Venice are said to resemble “an overflowed Arkansas town”; Lake Como looks less impressive than Lake Tahoe; and Michelangelo’s genius seems overexposed. “In Florence,” Twain complains of the great artist, “he painted every thing, designed every thing, nearly, and what he did not design he used to sit on a favorite stone and look at, and they showed us the stone . . . I never felt so fervently thankful, so soothed, so tranquil, so filled with a blessed peace, as I did yesterday when I learned that Michael Angelo was dead.”

At a time when most authors were lucky to sell a few thousand copies of a new title, *The Innocents Abroad* sold 160,000, making it one of the most popular books of the century. “It sells right along just like the Bible,” Twain would soon boast. All this was made possible by his decision to bypass the traditional methods of the book trade in favor of what was then the latest innovation—subscription publishing. Because he took a gamble on a marketing system that relied on agents selling door-to-door, his work was not limited to the bookstores of the major cities, but could reach ordinary readers eager for amusement in the vast hinterland of America.

For a relatively small price, the consumer was able to order a form of entertainment that was delivered straight to the home and was often listened to in the parlor, where the most literate person in the family could read it out loud to everyone else. Over the course of his career this simple form of distribution would make Twain so much money that he used to advise fellow authors, “Anything but subscription publication is printing for private circulation.” It also helped that Twain was able to boost his sales by going on the road and lecturing. Like the rock stars of a later time, he used his personal appearances to create a loyal base of followers who could then be counted on to buy his latest creative work.

“Am pretty well known, now,” he told his mother after returning from his European voyage. “Intend to be better known.”

“The gentle reader will never, never know what a consummate ass he can become until he goes abroad.”

~Mark Twain,
Innocents Abroad, 1869



“But the fellow knew no English and did not understand, so he simply said, ‘Sekki-yah!’ and the donkey was off again like a shot. He turned a corner suddenly, and Blucher went over his head.”

Public domain courtesy of Project Gutenberg

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. Why was the concept of the Bonanza so important to Twain?
2. How did Twain turn the notion of the European Grand Tour on its head?
3. How did subscription publishing help to make Twain a household name?

Suggested Reading

Twain, Mark. *The Innocents Abroad*. New York: Signet Classics, 2007 (1869).

Other Books of Interest

Twain, Mark. *Collected Tales, Sketches, Speeches & Essays, Volume I: 1852–1890*.
Ed. Louis J. Budd. New York: Library of America, 1992.

Websites of Interest

1. The *Mark Twain Project* website (University of California) features the text of a letter written by Mark Twain to William Bowen on June 7, 1867, the day before Twain departed on the *Quaker City*. —
<http://www.marktwainproject.org/xtf/view?docId=letters/UCCL00133.xml>
2. The *Electronic Text Center* at the University of Virginia provides information on publicity, advertising, sources, contemporary reviews, and library attributions associated with publishing *The Innocents Abroad*. —
<http://etext.virginia.edu/railton/innocent/iahompag.html>
3. The *Community Walk* website provides the Innocents Abroad Map created by Peter Biggins, which indicates the route taken by the *Quaker City* and places of interest visited by Twain and his traveling companions. —
http://www.communitywalk.com/the_innocents_abroad_map/map/319992

Lecture 5

The Gilded Age, 1869–1875

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Mark Twain's *Roughing It*.

The success of his first major book allowed Twain the chance to marry and start a family. In early 1870—little more than six months after the publication of *The Innocents Abroad*—he wed Olivia Langdon of Elmira, New York. Heiress to a large fortune accumulated by her coal-merchant father, Livy—as Twain called her—was a delicate woman with black hair, kind eyes, and a small but perfectly formed mouth. She grew up in a sheltered world where her parents indulged her every wish and patiently nursed her through a long period of poor health in her late teens and early twenties. Something about her innocence and fragile beauty attracted Twain, who was initially drawn to her when her brother—who was his fellow passenger on the *Quaker City* cruise—showed him a photograph of the young woman.

A homebody, Livy had no desire to share the kind of restless life that her husband had known for almost twenty years. She wanted to put down deep roots in her home state of New York and to continue living a quiet life. Twain convinced her that he wanted the same thing. After all the years of wandering and struggling, he longed for some peace and stability, and saw a chance to have it with his sweet-tempered wife.

For Livy's sake, he tried to turn himself into a proper Eastern gentleman. It didn't work. For a short period he gave up the pungent, cheap cigars that he preferred, but quickly returned to them when he found that writing was impossible if he wasn't smoking one of them. Similarly, his efforts to stop cursing like an old Mississippi bargeman ended when he would stub a toe or get overcharged for a meal. He was careless in his dress, sometimes rude to visitors, and inclined to forget his manners at formal gatherings.

Livy learned to live with it, though some in her circle doubted that the marriage would work. One family friend expressed amazement that Livy, “as frail in body as she is clear of mind & loving of soul, ever married the vulgar boor to whom she gave herself—I hear him all about the country at wine suppers . . . dirty, smoking, drinking.”



Olivia Langdon Clemens, ca. 1870
(1845–1904)

© Library of Congress

But the marriage would endure, and was especially happy in the early years. The newlyweds were fortunate to have not only a steady income from Twain's lectures and literary work, but substantial funds from Livy's wealthy family. They made their home first in Buffalo, and then in Hartford, where Twain's subscription publisher—the American Publishing Company—was based. Thanks in large part to Livy's money, they were able to build a red-brick mansion in the park-like neighborhood of Nook Farm. Completed in 1874, it was Twain's main residence for the next seventeen years.

(Summers were usually spent at a hilltop cottage in Elmira.)

Proud of his mansion, Twain

said of it, "We never came home from an absence that its face did not light up & speak out its eloquent welcome—and we could not enter it unmoved."

The happiest, and most productive, years of his life belong to the period when Hartford was the center of his world. It was a prosperous city with important national businesses such as the Colt Arms company and several major insurance companies. Located between Boston and New York, it offered a pleasant haven from the larger urban areas, and yet was close enough to allow Twain the chance to socialize with writers and editors in both major cities. Old friends back in Nevada, California, and Missouri were amazed that the rugged Sam Clemens they had known was able to adapt so easily to a genteel environment among respectable city folk.

Twain's experiences out West gave him the material for his second major book—*Roughing It*, which was published in 1872. An epic work that follows Twain from the Mississippi River to California, and then to Hawaii, the book is his first masterpiece. The narrative is often embellished to make the real story read better, but it captures perfectly the exhilarating adventure of one man discovering the wonders of the West and coming to terms with his own destiny as a writer. Parts of the book read like a travel narrative and other parts like a memoir. But much of it has the feel of a picaresque novel—in other words, a story of a charming rogue who bounces from one colorful scene of disorder to the next, relying on wit and blind luck to reach his reward at the end.



Home for the Clemens family was this stately mansion in Hartford, Connecticut.

"It wouldn't do to call it 'mongrel' for that would be offensive to some. I guess we'll call it 'eclectic'—the word describes everything that can't be otherwise described."

~Mark Twain describing his Hartford home in an interview, "Mark Twain Encountered," *New York Herald*, December 8, 1884

Almost exactly in the middle of the book, the hero has his Eureka moment, and even calls it by that traditional name for a sudden discovery. As Twain describes the event, he had just returned from a hard, and typically unproductive, day of digging for silver, when he received a letter from the *Territorial Enterprise* inviting him to work for the paper at the princely sum of twenty-five dollars a week. “Eureka!” he writes, and then adds with his characteristic flair for self-deprecation, “I never did know what Eureka meant, but it seems to be as proper a word to heave in as any when no other that sounds pretty offers.”

Like a character in a Dickens novel, the editor behind this life-changing offer has a name that fits his part in the narrative: “Mr. Goodman, I will call him, since it describes him as well as any name could do.” Thanks to this good man (whose real last name was the same—Joseph Goodman), the disappointed miner is given his first chance to follow the profession that will eventually lead him to write *Roughing It* and the rest of his many books. Eureka, from the Greek for “I have found it,” was precisely the word for this momentous occasion when Sam Clemens found his future as Mark Twain.

Though *Roughing It* may read at times like a novel, Twain didn’t actually try his hand at that form until his next book, which was published at the end of 1873. A joint effort with his friend and Hartford neighbor Charles Dudley Warner, *The Gilded Age* has a few memorable characters, but it isn’t a satisfying novel and is far inferior to Twain’s two previous books. The chapters written separately by Warner and Twain are uneven in quality and tone, with much of Warner’s contribution seeming dull and uninspired.

One of the best things about the novel is its title, which historians and social commentators have gladly accepted as a convenient term for the entire period between the Civil War and the beginning of the twentieth century. As a way of neatly summarizing the excesses of robber barons, society beauties, and political bosses, the “Gilded Age” title seems perfect. So, too, is the novel’s most interesting character, the irrepressible schemer, Colonel Sellers, whose impractical ideas for enriching himself escalate effortlessly from “there’s millions in it!” to “billions in it—billions.”

The only person Sellers enriched was Mark Twain, who later made a nice profit on a popular play adapted from the novel. It was called simply *Colonel Sellers*.

Mark Twain shakes hands with actor John Raymond, who played the title role in the play “Colonel Sellers,” which was based on Twain’s novel *The Gilded Age*.



© Dave Thomason/Library of Congress

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. Why did some people consider Twain and his wife a mismatched couple?
2. Why is Twain's "Eureka moment" so important in *Roughing It*?
3. What does *Roughing It* have in common with the picaresque novel?

Suggested Reading

Twain, Mark. *Roughing It*. Mark Twain Library. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002 (1872).

Other Books of Interest

Ward, Geoffrey C., and Dayton Duncan. *Mark Twain*. New York: Knopf, 2001.

Websites of Interest

1. The Mark Twain House & Museum in Hartford, Connecticut, cites as its mission to "foster an appreciation of the legacy of Mark Twain as one of our nation's defining cultural figures, and to demonstrate the continuing relevance of his work, life and times." — <http://www.marktwainhouse.org>
2. The *Project Gutenberg* website provides the complete text of *The Gilded Age: A Tale of To-Day* by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner. — <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/3178>

Lecture 6

The Poet of Childhood, 1876–1880

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

The year 1876 was an important one for Twain and America. It was the centennial of the Declaration of Independence and also the year that Twain published *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, a classic work that would define the charms of small-town American life for generations to come. As the first novel written entirely on his own, it marked a major step in Twain's development as an American writer with a distinctive style of American English and a distinctive perspective on American culture. It is worth noting that the first British edition appeared in London less than a month before the Fourth of July, 1876.

Twain once said that his novel was “simply a hymn” to boyhood, but it is also, more broadly, a celebration of what was best in the America that Twain knew as a boy. To be sure, there are dark undercurrents in his portrait of Tom Sawyer's St. Petersburg, a river town that has a lot in common with Hannibal. Like Twain's own hometown, Tom's is a place where violence can strike with sudden and awful ferocity (as shown by the frightening acts of the novel's villain, Injun Joe), and where such dangers as a deep cave can trap adventurous children and turn a moment of play into a near-death experience.

But what many readers remember best from Twain's novel is a way of life that was essentially good and uplifting, with humorously ineffective authority figures, endearingly mischievous children, and bright, lazy summer days that seem to go on forever in a landscape of great beauty and natural richness. In some of the scenes that endure we watch Tom tricking other boys into painting his fence, Tom showing off for Becky, Huck Finn indulging in his simple life of idle pleasure, and Tom and Huck searching for buried treasure. The dominant theme is the joy of independence, which is especially appropriate for a novel published in 1876. In the world of *Tom Sawyer*, the best kind of fun comes from breaking rules that unreasonably restrict freedom, as Tom himself demonstrates repeatedly.

Frontispiece illustration of Tom Sawyer fishing from the first U.S. edition (1876) of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.



Public domain courtesy of Project Gutenberg

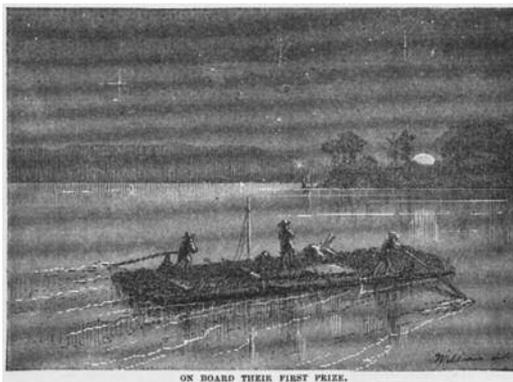
Of the relationship between Tom and Huck, Twain writes, “Tom was like the rest of the respectable boys, in that he envied Huckleberry his gaudy out-cast condition, and was under strict orders not to play with him. So he played with him every time he got a chance.”

As a writer who had earned fame primarily on the strength of his humor, Twain brings to Tom Sawyer a surprisingly strong talent for lyrical prose, as can be seen in a passage celebrating the moment when Tom and his friends are playing pirates on the river and finally find a place where they can be really free. The place is Jackson’s Island, and the moment is one in which the bonds of civilization have suddenly been severed. The feeling evoked by Twain’s description is one of pure bliss.

All nature was wide awake and stirring, now; long lances of sunlight pierced down through the dense foliage far and near, and a few butterflies came fluttering upon the scene. Tom stirred up the other pirates and they all clattered away with a shout, and in a minute or two were stripped and chasing after and tumbling over each other in the shallow limpid water of the white sand-bar. They felt no longing for the little village sleeping in the distance beyond the majestic waste of water. A vagrant current or a slight rise in the river had carried off their raft, but this only gratified them, since its going was something like burning the bridge between them and civilization.

“There comes a time in every rightly-constructed boy’s life when he has a raging desire to go somewhere and dig for hidden treasure.”

~Mark Twain,
The Adventures of Tom Sawyer



ON BOARD THEIR FIRST PRIZE.
An illustration of Tom, Huck Finn, and Joe Harper on a stolen raft headed for Jackson’s Island from Chapter XIII of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

Public domain courtesy of Project Gutenberg

It must be noted, however, that there is a great omission here in Twain’s poetic tributes to liberty. Like Thomas Jefferson’s failure in 1776 to include African-Americans in his vision of freedom, Twain has nothing to say in this novel about slavery in antebellum America. As one critic has put it, “blacks are almost invisible in Tom Sawyer.” It would take almost another ten years for Twain to return to the scenes of his youth and confront the glaring evil of slavery that undermined the ideal of American independence. But by the time he wrote *Huckleberry Finn*, he was willing to subject that evil to harsh scrutiny,

dealing honestly with the question of race in ways that no other major author of his time was prepared to do.

One reason for the omission of slavery in *Tom Sawyer* is that Twain must have considered the subject too complex to include in a straightforward, uncomplicated story intended as “simply a hymn” to boyhood. Part of the story’s appeal has always been its simplicity. But sticking to the basics was also important to Twain as a relatively inexperienced novelist who was still trying to master the art of narrative fiction. He didn’t want to risk losing the one thing that meant most to him at this point—recapturing the spirit of childhood.

But at this point in his career, why did the tough humorist want to put his irreverent wit on hold and explore the lost world of youth? The answer may lie in something that happened to Twain just a few months before he drew up his first plans for the novel. In June 1872, he and Livy suffered the loss of their first child. It was a boy. He was born premature in November 1870 and was never a healthy baby. Poor Langdon Clemens never even learned to walk and died of diphtheria at nineteen months.

Becoming a father and then watching his son die was a great trauma that Twain was still trying to overcome in late 1872 when he conceived the idea for a story about a boy enjoying a childhood that little Langdon would never know. If *Tom Sawyer* is a hymn, no doubt some of its more lyrical sections are a tribute to the boy who died before having much of a chance to live. It was certainly meant as a gift to Livy, perhaps as some compensation for their lost child. The dedication page reads, “To My Wife, This book is Affectionately Dedicated.”

“To die one’s self is a thing that must be easy, & light of consequence; but to lose a part of one’s self—well, we know how deep that pang goes, we who have suffered that disaster, received that wound which cannot heal.”

~Mark Twain,
Letter to Will Bowen,
November 4, 1888

As it happened, the couple never had another son. The rest of their children were girls. Susy—who would become Twain’s favorite—was born two and a half months before her brother’s death. Clara came next, born in 1874. And then the youngest, Jean, was born in 1880. Of course, *Tom Sawyer*—who entered the world in 1876—seems destined to live forever.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What is the dominant theme of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*?
2. How can we explain the omission of slavery in *Tom Sawyer*?
3. How did the death of his only son influence Twain's creation of Tom Sawyer?

Suggested Reading

Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982 (1876).

Other Books of Interest

Emerson, Everett. *Mark Twain: A Literary Life*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000.

Websites of Interest

The *Electronic Text Center* at the University of Virginia provides information on publicity, advertising, sources, contemporary reviews, and library attributions associated with publishing *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. —
<http://etext.virginia.edu/railton/tomsawye/tomhompg.html>

Lecture 7

Family Man, 1880–1883

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi*.

Though it's hard to believe now, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* was slow to find a large audience. It wasn't widely reviewed, and even after three years in print had sold fewer than thirty thousand copies. The lukewarm response didn't do much to boost Twain's confidence in his powers as a novelist, and in the 1870s he struggled to find another project that would do justice to his talents. Livy urged him to try his hand at serious historical fiction, and by that she meant stirring tales of courage and sacrifice in European history.

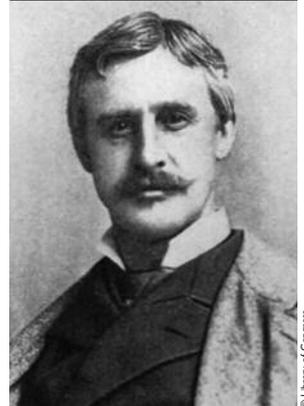
As someone who had a reputation for taking America's side against the old ways of Europe, he didn't seem a likely candidate for writing about knights and ladies or princes and cardinals in the dim mists of history. But Livy and other well-meaning admirers thought he would receive more respect as an author if he addressed weightier subjects than the common ones of American life in the hinterland. The longer he lived in the well-heeled environment of his Hartford neighborhood, the easier it became to see himself writing something that wasn't influenced by his old life on the other side of the Mississippi River.

As a social figure in the East, he had already acquired a very respectable circle of friends that included the novelist William Dean Howells and the Hartford clergyman Joseph Twichell, with whom he was especially close. Livy was pleased to know that her husband was spending a lot of time in the company of the minister of Hartford's Asylum Hill Congregational Church, but as Twain had discovered to his delight, Joe Twichell wasn't as prim and proper as many people assumed.

Blessed with a liberal temperament, Twichell was accustomed to being around men of all types, having served in the Civil War as a chaplain in one of the Union army's roughest regiments. Warm and effusive, he was never shy about expressing his fondness for "dear old Mark." In their correspondence he often closed with some

"A good man,
one of the best
of men, although
a clergyman."

~Mark Twain,
"Some Rambling Notes
of an Idle Excursion"



Joseph Hopkins Twichell, ca. 1870s
(1838–1918)

heartfelt declaration of affection for Twain. One letter concludes, “Well, my boy, may I never love you less, and I don’t think I ever shall.”

Their favorite activity was taking all-day hikes in the countryside around Hartford. Their usual destination was Bartlett’s tower, which stood on a small mountain eight miles west of the city. In spring and autumn they could often be seen strolling out of town in the direction of Talcott Mountain, absorbed in conversation as they walked. They discussed everything, from religion and politics to history and sex.

It was for their private amusement that Twain wrote his bawdy parody of life at the Elizabethan court, *1601*, the manuscript of which they would take on their walks and read out loud for laughs. (The little story features frank discussions of sexual matters amid much breaking of wind at court.) As the happy father of nine children, Joe Twichell was no stranger to the joys of sex, and Twain took pleasure in making wry references to the reverend’s virility. When someone once asked him how many children Joe had, Twain replied, “I don’t know. I haven’t heard from him since morning.”

As a work of historical fiction, *1601* isn’t exactly what Livy had in mind, and it’s doubtful that she ever saw it. But this parody is more in keeping with Twain’s true spirit than the tame novel about sixteenth-century royalty that he published in 1881. Regarded now as a children’s classic, *The Prince and the Pauper* is an example of Mark Twain writing on a leash, so to speak. The story of a poor boy of the London streets changing places with a Tudor prince is expertly told and easy to read, but the narrative has little of the sly humor and subversive wit that made Twain famous.



The Clemens family at home in Hartford, Connecticut, ca. 1870s. Pictured (left to right) are Clara, Hash (the dog), Livy, Jean, Sam, and Susy.

It was written to please his family, and it achieved its purpose. Livy thought it was one of his best books, and his daughters were soon mounting performances of the story on a homemade stage in their Hartford mansion, wearing fancy costumes and recruiting other children to help them entertain family and friends. Twain was flattered by the respect this work earned him in the neighborhood, and even took part in some of the performances himself, playing Miles Hendon, the brave protector of young Prince Edward. The story worked surprisingly well on stage, and was soon adapted for professional actors. "I used to play in this piece with my children," Twain told an audience at a New York performance in 1907, "who, twenty-two years ago, were little youngsters. One of my daughters was the Prince, and a neighbor's daughter was the Pauper, and the children of other neighbors played other parts."

But Twain couldn't help realizing that he had better stories to tell that were closer to his own time and place. His old friend from the *Territorial Enterprise*, Joe Goodman, was astounded that Twain was writing about old England and urged him to return to his American roots. "What could have sent you groping among the driftwood of the Deluge for a topic," Goodman wrote him, "when you could have been so much more at home in the wash of today?" Only a few weeks after getting this message from Goodman, Twain decided to go back to what he knew best and write a nonfiction work about the Mississippi.

"We are a very happy family. We consist of Papa, Mamma, Jean, Clara and me. It is Papa I am writing about, and I shall have no trouble in not knowing what to say about him, as he is a very striking character. He is a very good man and a very funny one. He has got a temper but we all of us have in this family. He is the loveliest man I ever saw or ever hope to see and oh so absent-minded. He does tell perfectly delightful stories. Clara and I used to sit on each arm of his chair and listen while he told us stories about the pictures on the wall."

~Susy Clemens, from her diary



Susy and Sam Clemens acting in *Hero and Leander* on the porch of their Onteora Park, New York, cabin in 1890. The hot-water bottle worn by Sam is a costume accessory in this delightful scene.

© The Mark Twain House & Museum, Hartford, CT

The result was his second masterpiece, *Life on the Mississippi*, which is not only a memoir of his career on the river, but a fascinating tour of it on a return visit in the early 1880s, twenty years after he piloted his last steamboat. In April and May 1882, he traveled on the river from St. Louis to New Orleans, and then back again, taking a fresh look at old familiar scenes through the eyes of a writer who was now much older and famous. The trip upstream was especially rewarding because it was made in a boat piloted by his old mentor, Horace Bixby, who was still devoted to the profession.

During his trip he was allowed to take the wheel and feel once again what it was like to guide the powerful vessel through the muddy current. He loved it. "I hadn't forgotten how to steer a steamboat," he later wrote, "nor how to enjoy it, either." When he was a "cub" pilot, he had been so busy learning the river that he never had much time to stand back and enjoy the beauty of its scenery or its place in the natural world.

One of the best passages in *Life on the Mississippi* comes when Twain finds himself alone in the pilot-house of Bixby's boat on the trip upstream in May 1882. A violent storm has caused Bixby to tie up to the bank about fifty miles south of Memphis, and everyone goes below except Twain. In describing what he sees, the writer demonstrates that now he has mastered language just as he had once mastered the river itself.

The wind bent the young trees down, exposing the pale underside of the leaves; and gust after gust followed, in quick succession, thrashing the branches violently up and down, and to this side and that, and creating swift waves of alternating green and white according to the side of the leaf that was exposed, and these waves raced after each other as they do their kind over a wind-tossed field of oats. No color that was visible anywhere was quite natural—all tints were charged with a leaden tinge from the solid cloud-bank overhead.

With *Life on the Mississippi*, Twain established his claim on the river as literary property that would always be associated with him. It wasn't simply that he knew the river so well, but that he was now able to put what he knew into words that would last. It was the book he had to write to prove that the river was his and that he was meant to be its greatest storyteller. Any number of good writers could spin tales about English princes and paupers, but only Mark Twain could capture the majesty of life on the Mississippi.

Having proved this to himself, he was ready to write his third—and greatest—masterpiece. But this time he took what he knew of the real river and the real town of Hannibal, and used the facts to construct a fiction that would reveal hard truths about not only the river and its people, but of all America. Turning fifty near the end of 1885, he was at the height of his powers, and it shows in the novel he published that year—*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. Why was Mark Twain's relationship with Joseph Twichell significant?
2. Why did Twain's wife encourage him to write *The Prince and the Pauper*?
3. Why can we say that Mark Twain established a claim on the Mississippi River as his literary property?

Suggested Reading

Twain, Mark. *Life on the Mississippi*. New York: Penguin Books, 1986 (1883).

Other Books of Interest

Courtney, Steve. *Joseph Hopkins Twichell: The Life and Times of Mark Twain's Closest Friend*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008.

Websites of Interest

The *Project Gutenberg* website provides the complete text of *1601* by Mark Twain. — <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/3190>

Lecture 8

A River Runs Through It, 1884–1885

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is **Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn***.

Though Twain finished *Huck Finn* only a year after revisiting the Mississippi, he had begun work on the story in the late 1870s. The pressures of family life and various difficulties with the narrative had caused him to put the manuscript aside for a few years, but once he resumed work on it in the summer of 1883, he made speedy progress. From his summer retreat in Elmira, he remarked happily, "I haven't had such booming writing-days for many years," and then joked, "This summer it is no more trouble to me to write than it is to lie."

After the book was finished in September, the work of preparing it for publication took more than a year, with a great deal of time being spent on illustrations and publicity. Anticipating large sales, and wanting to maintain as much control over the book as possible, Twain took the extraordinary step of starting his own company to publish it. He hired a nephew-in-law to run the company and named it after the young man, calling it Charles L. Webster & Company. A British edition was published at the end of 1884, but the American edition didn't appear until February 1885.

The book was a great commercial success, selling forty thousand copies by subscription in the first month of publication. Twain was overjoyed and boasted, "It seems to me that whatever I touch turns to gold." Reviews, however, were mixed. One New York newspaper dismissed the book as "careless hack-work" that would corrupt young readers with crude talk and violent episodes, while another praised its author as "the greatest living authority on the Mississippi River and on juvenile cussedness."

Proper society was horrified by the novel's focus on impoverished backwoods life and slave culture. Such subjects were too realistic for the delicate minds of refined youth. "If Mr. Clemens cannot think of something better to tell our pure-minded lads and lasses," said the author of *Little Women*, Louisa May Alcott, "he had better stop writing for them."

Twain insisted that he didn't care what high-minded reviewers said about his book. "I have never



Mark Twain, ca. 1880s.

© Library of Congress

tried in even one single little instance to help cultivate the cultivated classes," he said. What he was after, he claimed, was "bigger game—the masses."

In fact, *Huckleberry Finn* can be seen as a work that not only reaches out to common readers, but also makes a fierce assault on supposedly respectable culture and all its polite conventions. From the viewpoint of that culture, Huck is a vulgar youth whose education, morals, and manners are irredeemably bad. No one can tame him, but he is proud of that. His spirit is too large to be tamed, and he has too much integrity to abide by rules that don't make sense to him. Set in the 1840s, the story is one that draws much of its energy from the raw forces of the frontier, where the lines between the wilderness and the town are still in flux.

When the widow Douglas attempts—as Huck puts it—to “sivilize me,” her intentions may be good, but an acceptable life for a proper widow is like death to Huck. So many of the rules of society seem to go against natural instincts and force people to be untrue to themselves. As Huck says of the widow’s admonition to forego tobacco, “That is just the way with some people. They get down on a thing when they don’t know nothing about it.”

What Huck knows, despite his lack of education and poverty, is the pleasure of being his own master, which makes him a natural ally of Miss Watson’s slave, Jim, who desperately wants to escape and be his own master. By bringing the restless boy and the runaway slave together in a mutual quest for freedom, Twain created the dynamic that raises *Huckleberry Finn* far above the level of his earlier book on small-town America. Unlike *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, this second novel about the world of Twain’s youth



Public domain courtesy of Project Gutenberg

“When people let Huck Finn alone he goes peacefully along, damaging a few children here and there and yonder . . . so it is no great matter. It is only when well-meaning people expose him that he gets his real chance to do harm. Temporarily, then, he spreads havoc all around in the nurseries and no doubt does prodigious harm while he has his chance. By and by, let us hope, people that really have the best interests of the rising generation at heart will become wise and not stir Huck up.”

~Mark Twain,
Autobiography of Mark Twain,
1924

gives only a passing nod to the joys of boyhood. Those joys are now overshadowed by an adult world that is shown to be vicious and corrupt under its thin veneer of civilization.

“All details of ‘civilization’ are legitimate matters for jeering,” Twain once remarked. “It is made up of about three tenths of reality and sincerity, and seven tenths of wind and humbug.”

Most of the sincerity and decent reality in *Huckleberry Finn* is found only on the raft that Huck and Jim share as they float down the Mississippi in their flight from a “civilized” society that believes slavery is just. Whenever they go ashore or come near other craft on the river, they get full blasts of that “seven tenths of wind and humbug.” The two swindlers they meet who call themselves the King and the Duke are almost entirely creatures of wind and humbug. Their fancy talk and absurd titles are simply ways to cover their real identities as liars and thieves.

Some critics have complained that the journey on the raft is so aimless that it merely takes Jim deeper into the slave states. Why, they ask, doesn’t Jim escape to the free state of Illinois early in his flight? After all, Illinois is within easy reach on one side of the river for much of the journey down the Mississippi. But Twain knew that such a move didn’t guarantee freedom. The newspapers in his youth were full of stories about slave catchers tracking down runaways, and many people in Illinois were only too happy to collect rewards for helping to catch a slave.

What Jim and Huck learn is that no matter where they land on the river, they will find trouble. They are outcasts and can expect no safe haven along a waterway littered with outposts of supposed civilization that are, in fact, teeming with hostility, greed, and violence. The river itself is beautiful and free, but the great evil of slavery has cast a blight on the land that will eventually erupt in the cataclysmic violence of the Civil War. That war is prefigured in the senseless feud that rages between the Shepherdsons and the Grangerfords, two families whose casual brutality horrifies Huck.

Righteous in their hatred of each other, neither family sees anything wrong in their willingness to murder each other one day and attend church the next. Huck goes with the Grangerfords to Sunday services, where they keep their weapons close at hand.

“A feud is this way: A man has a quarrel with another man, and kills him; then that other man’s brother kills him; then the other brothers, on both sides, goes for one another; then the cousins chip in—and by and by everybody’s killed off, and there ain’t no more feud. But it’s kind of slow, and takes a long time.”

~Mark Twain,
Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

“It was pretty ornery preaching,” says Huck, “all about brotherly love, and such-like tiresomeness; but everybody said it was a good sermon, and they all talked it over going home, and had such a powerful lot to say about faith, and good works, and free grace, and preforeordination, and I don’t know what all, that it did seem to me to be one of the roughest Sundays I had run across yet.”

Huck and Jim can feel at peace only when they’re on the raft and no one else is in sight. After escaping from one of the battles between the feuding families, Huck says, “I never felt easy till the raft was two mile below there and out in the middle of the Mississippi. Then we hung up our signal lantern, and judged that we was free and safe once more.”

In a war that caused brother to fight against brother, the Mississippi valley turned bloody after Twain left the river, and it was only when he revisited it in the 1880s that he understood fully how much the war had cost the region in lives and lost opportunities. In his novel about a boy and a slave, Twain looked deep into the heart of his country and saw that its dream of liberty for all was still as elusive as the rapid waters of the river, but that it was still alive, if only in isolated spots like those of the raft where Huck and Jim dream of a better life.



Public domain courtesy of Project Gutenberg

“We said there warn’t no home like a raft, after all,” says Huck. “Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don’t. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft.”

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. Why did Louisa May Alcott object to Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*?
2. How is the feud between the Shepherdsons and the Grangerfords a commentary on the American Civil War?
3. Why is the raft such an important part of the story in *Huckleberry Finn*?

Suggested Reading

Twain, Mark. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Norton Critical ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999 (1885).

Other Books of Interest

Chadwick-Joshua, Jocelyn. *The Jim Dilemma: Reading Race in Huckleberry Finn*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1998.

Websites of Interest

The *Twainquotes* website provides an article from a 1935 issue of the *New York Times* about the 1905 controversy over *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Twain's response to it. — <http://www.twainquotes.com/19351102.html>

Lecture 9

The Wizard of Hartford, 1886–1890

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*.

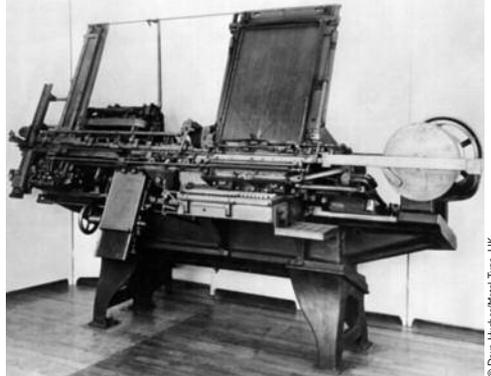
Life in Hartford for Twain and his family was so good for so long that he often thought he was dreaming, and was fond of musing in those happy times on “the story of his life, the inexhaustible, the fairy, the Arabian Nights story.” Thinking that he did indeed have a golden touch, he began to invest his money—and Livy’s—in all kinds of speculative ventures. Like his famous character Colonel Sellers, he dreamed of making a fortune overnight.

He had high hopes for a new invention that he believed would become his own version of the Comstock Lode—the Paige typesetter, which was supposed to revolutionize the printing industry. He called the device his “Big Bonanza,” hoping it would yield riches as abundant as any deposit of gold or silver. So great were his hopes for the machine that he once said it was “worth billions,” a claim that echoes the words of Colonel Sellers.

As a former printer’s apprentice who had spent a good part of his teens setting type by hand, Twain allowed himself to be misled by his enthusiasm for the new labor-saving device. It could do in less than an hour the work that took a day to accomplish by hand. But, with a total of eighteen thousand parts, inventor James Paige’s intricate creation was simply too complex to be operated easily and to run efficiently for many hours. The rival Linotype machine would prove much more reliable, but Twain kept faith in the other device for so long because its greater complexity made him assume that it would eventually outperform simpler devices.

“The printer’s art, which is the noblest and most puissant of all arts, and destined in the ages to come to promote the others and preserve them.”

~Mark Twain,
No. 44, *The Mysterious Stranger*



Inventor James W. Paige filed for a patent on the Paige typesetter in 1887, finally receiving it in 1895. The machine required over 18,000 parts and was notable for its frequent breakdowns. Few of the units were sold.

The dream behind these inventions was that they would make it so inexpensive to print books, magazines, and newspapers that there would be an upsurge in reading and a new golden age of education and improvement. For Twain, the payoff was twofold. First, he expected that mechanized printing would vastly increase the audience for his books. And, second, he thought that so many printers around the world would have to buy new equipment that Paige's machine would sell in the thousands for years and years.

In part, his determination to stick with Paige came from his regret at failing to invest in the early development of other new mechanical wonders, especially the telephone. He had readily agreed to acquire one of Alexander Graham Bell's new devices when they first appeared, but had refused to buy any shares in the inventor's company. He blamed his mistake on a temporary phase of excessively prudent economizing after some of his other investments had collapsed and left him feeling like a "burnt child." Later, as he watched a neighbor of average ability reap huge profits from an investment in the telephone stock, he could only shake his head and declare with a rueful smile, "It is strange the way the ignorant and inexperienced so often and so undeservedly succeed when the informed and the experienced fail."

In one of those moments when he was suffering from an acute sense of regret, he received a letter offering him copies of a new series of self-help books for inventors. The author of the work was hoping for an endorsement, but received this reply instead: "If your books tell how to exterminate inventors send me nine editions. Send them by express. Very truly yours, S.L. Clemens."

This ambivalent attitude toward the machine age is reflected in his final masterpiece, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, which was written in the late 1880s and published at the end of 1889. Instead of trying to write another work of historical fiction like *The Prince and the Pauper*, Twain decided to use the distant past as a way of satirizing European and American societies at the end of his own century. When the main character of the novel, Hank Morgan—a superintendent at the Colt Arms factory in Hartford—is hit on the head and wakes up in King Arthur's England, he quickly makes the most of his training by transforming the medieval kingdom into a model society built on progressive ideals and mechanical wonders. The experiment is a spectacular failure.

Twain has great fun in the novel describing the comic effects of knights on bicycles, baseball players in armor, and Hank Morgan's plans for steamboats on the Thames River and for "an expedition to discover America." As Sir Boss, Hank puts an end to medieval



Public domain courtesy of Project Gutenberg

slavery, starts schools and newspapers, and creates a telephone and telegraph network. He enjoys the work of reform and innovation, but he is also a born showman who delights in doing things on a grand scale. He doesn't want to settle for modest changes, but wants to sweep away one world with the wave of his hand and put another in its place almost overnight.

Hank is the magician of modern progress and his chief foe in Arthurian England is the established, old-fashioned magician Merlin, who schemes continually to outwit the Yankee. At first, Hank has the upper hand and turns Merlin into a laughingstock, keeping him around as a minor functionary to perform parlor tricks. But Merlin bides his time, plotting revenge as the wild schemes of Sir Boss grow bigger and more complex.

The fact that Hank was once a powerful man at Hartford's Colt company is a clue that his relentless modernizing spirit reflects Twain's own hopes for the Paige typesetter, parts of which were manufactured at the Colt factory. But the frustrations surrounding development of that invention are also reflected in the novel when Hank's great experiment begins to go wrong. Religious leaders and other powerful interests try to undermine everything Hanks does, and he turns on his enemies with all the technical might he can muster, staging a huge battle in which thousands are slaughtered by explosions, electric fences, and Gatling guns.

At the end of the novel Hank's empire lies in ruins. He tries to do too much too fast, and all of his new gadgets merely increase the speed of his disastrous fall. For Twain, it was a sad premonition. In his own life he was also nearing the collapse of his magical time as the Missouri Showman in Yankee Hartford. Hank's tragedy—a great man of talent overplaying his hand and suffering terrible losses—would soon become Twain's.



Public domain courtesy of Project Gutenberg

“But when I saw them put the noose around his neck, then everything let go in me and I made a spring to the rescue—and as I made it I shot one more glance abroad—by George! here they came, a-tilting!—five hundred mailed and belted knights on bicycles!”

~Mark Twain,
*A Connecticut Yankee
in King Arthur's Court*

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. Why did Twain have such high hopes for the Paige typesetter?
2. Why did Twain have an ambivalent attitude toward the machine age?
3. Why is Hank Morgan the magician of modern progress?

Suggested Reading

Twain, Mark. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. Norton Critical Edition. New York: W.W. Norton, 1982 (1889).

Other Books of Interest

Cox, James M. *Mark Twain: The Fate of Humor*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966.

Michelson, Bruce. *Printer's Devil: Mark Twain and the American Publishing Revolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

Lecture 10

Going for Broke, 1891–1895

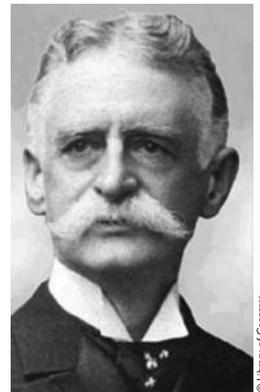
The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Mark Twain's *Following the Equator*.

By some estimates, Mark Twain invested almost a quarter of a million dollars in the Paige typesetter. Each time that some new glitch developed and more money was required to fix it, Twain dug deeper into his pocket and came up with the necessary funds. But in 1890—within months of finishing his novel about the Connecticut Yankee—he began to run out of money. The rising costs of operating his own publishing firm contributed to his financial problems, especially when it was discovered that a bookkeeper had been embezzling from the firm. He quickly found himself surrounded by creditors demanding money he didn't have.

All these troubles soon forced him out of his Hartford mansion—which he couldn't bring himself to sell, but which he could no longer afford to maintain—and led to a long exile abroad, where he and his family lived in various hotels and rented houses. In 1894, when Twain's unpaid debts soared to \$160,000, and his creditors were threatening to seize all his assets—including his copyrights—he was rescued by a new friend—the Wall Street investor and Standard Oil executive Henry H. Rogers. A great admirer of the author's books, Rogers was glad to help the beleaguered writer arrange new credit and avoid financial disaster. He asked nothing in return, believing that he was repaying a debt of his own—one that he owed to the author for all the pleasure he had taken from his books over the years.

"They were bent on devouring every pound of flesh in sight and picking the bones," Rogers later said of the creditors. He met with them one afternoon and heard their demands. They confidently insisted "that Mark Twain should turn over his copyrights," and wouldn't entertain any compromise or further delay. But their "high-handed manner" offended Rogers, who wasn't used to accepting other people's terms.

He told them flatly, "Gentlemen, you are not going to have this thing all your way." Then he surprised them with an argument they had not expected. Noting that Twain had borrowed more money from his wife's personal fortune than from any other source, he announced that she qualified as the "chief creditor," and



Henry Huttleston Rogers
(1840–1909)

© Library of Congress

that therefore she had first claim on the copyrights. He made the point with such conviction and force that nobody in the room was willing or able to rebut him. In due course all the copyrights were assigned to Livy. Single-handedly, Rogers saved his friend's most valuable assets. As far as Twain was concerned, there was no higher service anyone could have done for him.

To recover from his financial misfortunes, Twain set forth in 1895 on a round-the-world lecture tour. It was an enormous success and took him to such exotic locations as Ceylon, South Africa, and the little island of Mauritius. Because the author placed absolute trust in Rogers, he turned over to him thousands of dollars from the tour and let him invest it. He was handsomely rewarded. Almost without fail the price of his stocks went up and brought him large gains. He was happy to take the money and not look too closely into how Rogers performed these feats of financial wizardry.

"Why, it is just splendid!" Twain wrote to him after receiving a nice windfall. "I have nothing to do but sit around and watch you set the hen and hatch those big broods and make my living for me. Don't you wish you had somebody to do the same for you?—a magician who can turn steel and copper and Brooklyn gas into gold."

"Yes, even I am dishonest. Not in many ways, but in some. Forty-one, I think it is."

~Mark Twain,
Letter to Joseph Twichell,
March 14, 1905

According to Rogers's critics on Wall Street, there was nothing magical about some of his more spectacular gains from the stock market. He rigged the system, they charged, guaranteeing profits for himself and his friends, and losses for everyone else who was blind to his tactics. His most infamous case involved acquiring mines with borrowed funds, and then offering stock in a new company called Amalgamated Copper, whose value was advertised at a wildly inflated rate. He made millions when speculators caught "copper fever" and bought up every share. When Wall Street insiders began selling their stock to make a quick profit, the price fell and many ordinary investors were left with huge losses. Howls of protest erupted against Henry Rogers—the Pirate of Wall Street.

"He's a pirate all right," Twain admitted, "but he owns up to it and enjoys being a pirate. That's the reason I like him."

In his eyes, his friend occupied a plane far above that of the other tycoons. He was more generous, more amiable, and more interesting. And he was at ease with the type—a self-made man who had struck it rich. Most important, Rogers had become nothing less than the author's invaluable partner in the business of life.

For Rogers, playing the fearless buccaneer in the business world was a serious game. For Twain, it was just a game—the stuff of fantasy, like the daydreams of Tom Sawyer, whose favorite pastime is pretending to be a pirate on

the river. Under an oak tree on Cardiff Hill, Tom sits back and imagines the joy of becoming famous one day as “the Black Avenger of the Spanish Main.” He sees himself arrayed in glory with a plumed hat, red sash, “crime-rusted cutlass,” and high boots. “How his name would fill the world,” he muses in a moment of youthful ecstasy, “and make people shudder.” As Twain jokes in *Life on the Mississippi*, the boys of his hometown “had a hope that if we lived and were good, God would permit us to be pirates.”

There is more than a touch of Tom Sawyer in Mark Twain’s lively description of his own money-making abilities as an internationally famous author giving talks during his world tour, and then sending the profits home to his trusted partner at Standard Oil: “On the 15th of July, 1895, [I started] on our lecturing raid around the world. We lectured and robbed and raided for thirteen months . . . I sent the book-money and lecture-money to Mr. Rogers as fast as we captured it.” It pleased Twain to think of himself as a mildly disreputable but lovable figure in league with similar fellows. Thanks to Rogers, he was finally able to overcome the fiasco of the Paige typesetter, whose inventor never did get it to work properly.

The story of Twain’s long lecture tour is told in *Following the Equator*, the last of his major books in which travel plays a large part. Published in 1897, it is a relatively straightforward narrative with only occasional flashes of Twain’s great wit. For the author the great surprise of the trip was the almost dream-like strangeness of Ceylon and India. He was amazed by the way that the direst poverty and some of the most beautiful scenery could exist side by side. But even in serious moments of contemplation he was sometimes able to return to his old playful self and find humor in unexpected places.

Encountering a Hindu holy man, he tried to appear properly respectful, but when the man gave him a copy of a spiritual work Twain enjoyed the chance to return the favor with a gift of his own about one of his wonderfully unholy heroes. “I gave him a copy of *Huckleberry Finn*,” says Twain. “I thought it might rest him up a little to mix it in along with his meditations on Brahma, for he looked tired, and I knew that if it didn’t do him any good it wouldn’t do him any harm.”



The frontispiece for *Following the Equator* shows Twain relaxing at the rail of the steamship *Warrimo* during the journey.

Public domain courtesy of Project Gutenberg

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. How did Henry Rogers rescue Mark Twain?
2. Why was Twain fascinated by pirates?
3. Why do India and Ceylon stand out in Twain's *Following the Equator*?

Suggested Reading

Twain, Mark. *Following the Equator*. New York: Library of America, 2010 (1897).

Other Books of Interest

Messent, Peter. *Mark Twain and Male Friendship: The Twichell, Howells, and Rogers Friendships*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2009.

Twain, Mark. *Mark Twain's Correspondence with Henry Huttleston Rogers, 1893–1909*. Ed. Lewis Leary. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.

Websites of Interest

1. The *Electronic Text Center* at the University of Virginia provides an overview of Mark Twain's world tour. —
<http://etext.virginia.edu/railton/onstage/world.html>
2. The *Twainquotes* website provides a section entitled "Mark Twain and Henry Huttleston Rogers in Virginia." —
<http://www.twainquotes.com/TwainRogersVA.html>

Lecture II

Death and the Maiden, 1896–1899

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is *Collected Tales, Sketches, Speeches and Essays: Volume 2: 1891–1910*, edited by Louis J. Budd.

Exhausted but happy to have earned a profit of \$35,000, Twain completed his long lecture tour in July 1896 when he landed in England and took time out for a well-deserved rest. But shortly after his arrival he and Livy—who had been traveling with him since the beginning of the tour—received bad news. Their oldest daughter, Susy, was ill back in Hartford. At twenty-four Susy was old enough to be living on her own, but had not yet decided on a path for her life when she developed a mysterious fever that summer. Fearing the worst, Livy sailed immediately for America to be at her daughter’s side.

She didn’t make it in time. Susy had spinal meningitis and died on August 18, 1896. Twain received the news first in England while Livy was still at sea. He was heartbroken and blamed himself “for laying the foundation of all our troubles.” Because he had risked so much money on the Paige typesetter and his publishing company, he believed that he had placed too much stress on the family and robbed them of their happy life in Hartford. “I have brought misfortune and sorrow to this family,” he lamented.

In the dark aftermath of Susy’s death, he and the rest of the family took refuge from the world in a little corner of London while they gathered strength to begin their lives again. The house they chose was in a sleepy part of Chelsea: Tedworth Square—a short stroll from the Thames River. In those difficult days, Twain was grateful to have neighbors who respected his privacy. “In some countries I might find it difficult to escape,” he noted, “but one is safe here.”

He lived so quietly that rumors began to spread that he was near death. One day a journalist—Frank Marshall White—showed up at his door and asked for his response to a rumor that he was dying. White sent a cable to his New York editor

“In all things she was intense; in her this characteristic was not a mere glow, dispensing warmth, but a consuming fire.”

~Mark Twain,
“A Family Sketch,”
1896



Olivia Susan Clemens, 1885
(1872–1896)

with Twain's famous comment, "The report of my death was an exaggeration." Other press accounts altered this to read, "The reports of my death are grossly exaggerated," and "grossly" was soon replaced by "greatly" in the more popular version. "Of course I'm dying," Twain told White, "but I'm not dying any faster than anybody else."

Slowly, Twain regained his interest in life and emerged from his long period of mourning. His second daughter, Clara, came up with a plan for giving the family a welcome change of scenery. A good pianist, she had hopes of becoming an exceptional one and talked her parents into taking her to Vienna in 1897, where she became a pupil of one of the great piano teachers of the period, Theodor Leschetizky. She was twenty-three at the time, Vienna was dazzling in all its *fin-de-siècle* glamour, and her father's reputation in Austria was so high that everyone seemed to treat the family as though they were royalty.

She and her sister, Jean, became fluent in German, which they had been studying for years. Their father liked making jokes about the language ("In the hospital yesterday, a word of thirteen syllables was successfully removed from a patient—a North German from near Hamburg"), but he encouraged everyone in the family to learn it. He was able to speak it well enough to use it in the introductions to lectures he gave in Vienna. No less a figure than Sigmund Freud attended one of Twain's talks and described it as "a sheer delight." During his stay in Vienna, Twain was invited to so many social events that he felt he was becoming "a self-appointed Ambassador-at-Large of the U.S. of America—without salary."

But just as the family was rebounding from the blow of Susy's death, another tragedy came along in the form of a disease that undermined young Jean's health. In 1896, when she was only sixteen, she began to have seizures that were soon diagnosed as epileptic fits. She could go for months without suffering a major seizure, but then a bad week would come along, and she might have three or four attacks in a single day. The unpredictability of her illness, the trauma of her convulsions, and the complete absence of any effective medication took a heavy toll on her and her family. Monitoring the erratic course of her disease, Twain said, "was like watching a house that was forever catching fire, & promised to burn down if you ever closed an eye."



Mark Twain, America's Best Humorist

A black-and-white print of a lithograph by Joseph F. Keppler, which appeared on the back cover of *Puck*, December 23, 1885.

Given the sudden onslaught of sorrows and difficulties that he faced in the late 1890s, it is a wonder that Twain was able to get anything done as a writer. But, in fact, he managed to complete not only *Following the Equator* but also a long story that is widely regarded as one of his best works. Written in 1898 and first published in 1899, “The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg” is a sharp satire on small-town greed, arrogance, and complacency. It is almost twenty thousand words of Mark Twain on the loose, jeering in free flow at a community pretending to be “honest and upright” but full of corruption at the core, and exposing it in a way that is as powerful as anything in *Huckleberry Finn*.

He was so proud of the story’s uncompromising look at a town gone bad that he later expressed his gratitude that “he had lived long enough to be able, & fearless enough, to write just what he knew to be true: that ‘every man has his price,’ and that Hadleyburg had given him his chance to show it up.” Angry and bitter after Susy’s death, and frustrated by Jean’s struggle with epilepsy, he was more determined than ever to speak his mind, lashing out against the shortcomings of his society, and calling “a spade a spade instead of coldly symbolizing it as a snow shovel.”

“Hadleyburg village woke up world-celebrated—astonished—happy—vain. Vain beyond imagination. Its nineteen principal citizens and their wives went about shaking hands with each other, and beaming, and smiling, and congratulating, and saying this thing adds a new word to the dictionary—Hadleyburg, synonym for incorruptible—destined to live in dictionaries for ever!”

~Mark Twain,
“The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg,”
1899



© Clipart.com

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. Why did Twain blame himself for Susy's death?
2. How was Twain received during his stay in Vienna?
3. Why was Twain so proud of "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg"?

Suggested Reading

Twain, Mark. *Collected Tales, Sketches, Speeches and Essays: Volume 2: 1891–1910*. Ed. Louis J. Budd. New York: Library of America, 1992.

Other Books of Interest

Bush, Harold K., Jr. *Mark Twain and the Spiritual Crisis of His Age*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007.

Clemens, Susy. *Papa: An Intimate Biography of Mark Twain*. New York: Doubleday Books, 1988.

Dolmetsch, Carl. "Our Famous Guest": *Mark Twain in Vienna*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992.

Lecture 12

The Most Famous Man in America, 1900–1905

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is *Mark Twain's Weapons of Satire: Anti-Imperialist Writings on the Philippine-American War*, edited by Jim Zwick.

After spending much of the 1890s abroad, Twain returned to America in 1900 and made it known that he intended to stay. He was greeted like a hero returning from a long war and was hailed in the press for paying off his debts and starting his life anew. “Our friend entered the fiery furnace a man,” declared Andrew Carnegie, “and emerged a hero.”

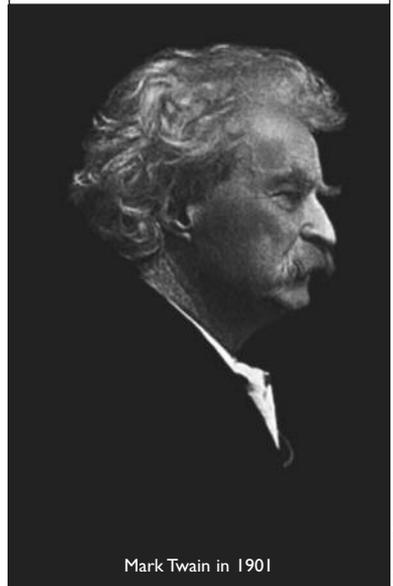
But the Mark Twain who came back home was a different man than the one who had left. World travel had helped to make him more sensitive to America's growing power in global affairs, and his personal tragedies had made him less willing to accept conventional notions of religion and morality. It didn't take him long to begin criticizing the imperial ambitions of both European and American politicians. He also didn't hesitate to question pious religious figures who wanted to impose their views on others.

He became a vociferous critic of missionaries—especially those working in Asia, where the new American empire was making inroads. In 1901 he had expressed his views in the powerful essay “To the Person Sitting in Darkness,” urging American missionaries and other ambassadors of “the Blessings-of-Civilization Trust” to quit meddling in the affairs of China or any other place where the natives were presumed to be living in darkness. “Give those poor things a rest,” he said. They had already suffered enough from exposure to “Maxim Guns and Hymn Books, and Trade-Gin and Torches of Progress and Enlightenment (patent adjustable ones, good to fire villages with, upon occasion).”

As he argued privately, if the missionaries

“I am an anti-imperialist.
I am opposed to having
the eagle put its talons on
any other land.”

~Mark Twain quoted in
“A Pen Warmed Up in Hell”



Mark Twain in 1901

really wanted to do good work, they could return home and help stop lynchings and similar atrocities committed by supposedly God-fearing Americans. "O kind missionary," he joked bitterly, "O compassionate missionary, leave China! come home and convert these Christians!"

Angered by saber-rattling politicians eager to start wars, and horrified by the brutality of the fighting in the Philippines during the Spanish-American War, Twain created one of the most powerful anti-war documents ever penned. In "The War Prayer"—which was written in 1905 but rejected for publication in March of that year by *Harper's Bazaar* as "not quite suited to a woman's magazine"—Twain directed his anger against sanctimonious warmongers. If such people spoke truthfully, he pointed out, any prayer for divine assistance in war would reveal its hypocrisy instantly, exposing the real terrors of a victorious campaign against a supposedly unrighteous enemy: "Lord, blast their hopes, blight their lives, protract their bitter pilgrimage, make heavy their steps, water their way with their tears, stain the white snow with the blood of their wounded feet! We ask it in the spirit of love, of Him Who Is the Source of Love, and Who is the ever-faithful refuge and friend of all that are sore beset . . . Amen."

Twain didn't spare foreign leaders from his criticisms. In "King Leopold's Soliloquy"—first published as a pamphlet in 1905—he vilified King Leopold II of Belgium for his heartless and sadistic rule over the Congo. To increase profits from ivory and rubber, Leopold's officials were forcing millions of Africans to toil in misery, using torture, murder, and mutilation to terrorize the population into submission. The evidence of the king's brutal tyranny was abundant, thanks largely to the work of a grassroots British campaign to expose the horrors inflicted on the colony.

Referring to the dozens of photographs circulating in Britain and America of Africans whose severed

Two Congolese children whose hands were amputated by the *Force Publique*, Leopold II's private army. The picture appeared in a 1905 printed edition of Mark Twain's "King Leopold's Soliloquy: A Defense of His Congo Rule."

"Beside Leopold, Nero, Caligula, Attilo, Torquemada, Genghis Khan and such killers of men are mere amateurs."

~Mark Twain
statement published in
the *New York World*,
December 3, 1905



Public Domain

hands were graphic reminders of the barbaric punishments routinely administered in the Congo, Twain's Leopold bitterly curses "the incorruptible kodak . . . The only witness I have encountered in my long experience that I couldn't bribe." At the rate the king's men were maiming and killing the population, Twain predicted, the so-called Congo Free State would soon become the Congo Free Graveyard. Yet the horrors continued to multiply "by the silent consent of all the Christian powers except England." In disgust, Twain dismissed Leopold as a "bloody monster . . . whose personality will surely shame hell itself when he arrives there—which will be soon, let us hope and trust."

Another target of his anger in these years was Mary Baker Eddy and the Christian Science movement she had founded. His quarrel was not so much with the religion as with the character of its leader, whom he enjoyed criticizing in personal terms that were bound to offend many of her admirers. In his view, Eddy ruled over her church like an American pope, communing with God behind the lace curtains of her Victorian parlor and giving orders with the certainty of one who thought "her authority was from heaven, and had no limits."



Public domain courtesy of Project Gutenberg

Mary Baker Eddy, ca. 1870s
(1821–1910)

Even after stirring up so much trouble, Twain was still revered by most of his fellow citizens, who valued his honesty and insight. Praise continued to be heaped on him throughout the first decade of the twentieth century, and he was gratified to find that so many people shared his views. "He receives more letters of approval than of disapproval," a surprised Livy noted, "ten to one I should think."

In 1902, he was invited to the University of Missouri to receive an honorary degree—doctor of laws—and was asked to head the graduation procession, taking precedence over two visiting dignitaries from President Theodore Roosevelt's cabinet. With his mortarboard riding uneasily on his full crop of white hair, he led the long parade of gowned figures to the stage and began the solemn duty of handing out diplomas.

When the time arrived for him to get his own degree, he was introduced—simply and accurately—as "America's foremost author and best-loved citizen, Samuel Langhorne Clemens—Mark Twain." As the crowd roared its approval, he stood up and walked slowly to the speaker's podium, where he paused and looked out at the large assembly of beaming faces. The applause died down and a great hush fell over the long rows of students, faculty, and parents.

Several seconds of silence ticked away, but Twain made no discernible effort to speak. Overcome by the events of what he later called "an intensely emotional week," he seemed frozen in place, unable to move or utter a sound. After a few more seconds passed, the spectators did some-

thing extraordinary. Almost as one, and without any prompting, they rose and stood before their guest in a quiet show of respect. Nobody said a word or made any gesture. Then, from the back row, someone suddenly cried out “M,” and everyone joined voices to finish a familiar chant, pausing between each letter: “M–I–S–S–O–U–R–I.” The outburst set Twain at ease and warmed his heart.

It was a moment of high drama for the largely self-educated native son who, nearly half a century earlier, had left tiny Hannibal, Missouri, in search of adventure and fortune, and who had found an abundance of both.

“I rejoiced [again] when Missouri University made me a Doctor of Laws, because it was all clear profit, I not knowing anything about laws except how to evade them and not get caught.”

~Mark Twain,
Mark Twain's Autobiography,
1924



© University of Missouri—Columbia

Mark Twain at the University of Missouri, June 1902

In the front row with Mark Twain is Robert Somers Brookings, founder of the Brookings Institute. In the back row, left to right: Ethan Allen Hitchcock, Secretary of Interior; James Wilson, Secretary of Agriculture; and Dr. Beverley Thomas Galloway, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What is the powerful message behind “The War Prayer”?
2. Why was Twain angry with King Leopold?
3. Why was Mary Baker Eddy a target of Twain’s criticism?

Suggested Reading

Twain, Mark. *Mark Twain’s Weapons of Satire: Anti-Imperialist Writings on the Philippine-American War*. Ed. Jim Zwick. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992.

Other Books of Interest

Seelye, John D. *Mark Twain in the Movies: A Meditation with Pictures*. New York: Viking Press, 1977.

Websites of Interest

1. The *American Museum of Natural History* website provides the text of Mark Twain’s “King Leopold’s Soliloquy.” —
<http://diglib1.amnh.org/articles/kls/index.html>
2. The *Read Print* website provides the complete text of Mark Twain’s “The War Prayer.” —
<http://www.readprint.com/work-6143/The-War-Prayer-Mark-Twain>

Lecture 13

Man in White, 1906–1907

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is Michael Sheldon's *Mark Twain, Man in White: The Grand Adventure of His Final Years*.

Never robust in health, Livy began to suffer chest pains in 1902, and her heart condition worsened rapidly over the next two years. She died on June 5, 1904. Twain felt lost without her and was swallowed up by grief. Shortly after losing her, he wrote, "The world is black today, & I think it will never lighten again." A few days later he complained, "In my life there have been 68 Junes—but how vague and colorless 67 of them are contrasted with the deep blackness of this one."

With his usual resilience, he responded to this new wave of sorrow by overcoming it in slow degrees until he felt that life could begin again. He knew that his death could not be far off, and he resolved to make the most of the time left to him. He plunged into a new literary project that was much bigger than anything he had attempted before. He planned to create a massive autobiography that would total half a million words.

Twain was not so energetic, however, that he wanted to use a pen of his own to create his autobiography. He was willing to do it only if he could dictate it. "After forty years of slavery to the pen," as he put it, he was ready to break free and try something new. Since he was such a fluent public speaker, he found that dictating was "pleasanter work." What he wanted to achieve was not a straightforward narrative of a life, but a series of impromptu sketches depicting the author in the act of being himself.

"Marriage—yes, it is the supreme felicity of life. I concede it. And it is also the supreme tragedy of life. The deeper the love the surer the tragedy. And the more disconsolating when it comes."

~Mark Twain,
Letter to Father Fitz-Simon,
June 5, 1908

Sam and Olivia Clemens, 1902



As he confided to William Dean Howells, his ambition was to capture “the subtle something which makes good talk so much better than the best imitation of it that can be done with a pen.” In other words, he wanted to give readers the sensation of meeting Mark Twain in the flesh and listening to him as an audience of one, “with the result being that the reader knows the author.”

He also wanted an official biography and appointed a young author—Albert Bigelow Paine—to write it while they lived and worked together. By 1906, he and Paine were busy piling up pages, and all this activity had a reinvigorating effect on Twain, who turned seventy-one in November. The next month he demonstrated that he still had a lot of life left in him by making a sensational public appearance at a congressional hearing on copyright in the Library of Congress at Washington, DC.

The gathering was stunned when he removed his overcoat on that cold December day and stood at the front of the room clothed all in white. His outfit perfectly matched his hair, from his white collar and cravat—held in place by a “creamy moonstone”—to his white shoes. Many people wore white suits in summer, but proper gentlemen never wore them in winter. Twain didn’t care. “I hope to get together courage enough to wear white clothes all through the winter,” he said. “It will be a great satisfaction to me to show off in this way.” He wasn’t ashamed to seek attention, explaining, “The desire for fame is only the desire to be continuously conspicuous and attract attention and be talked about.” Indeed, his debut in white provoked comment on front-pages everywhere.

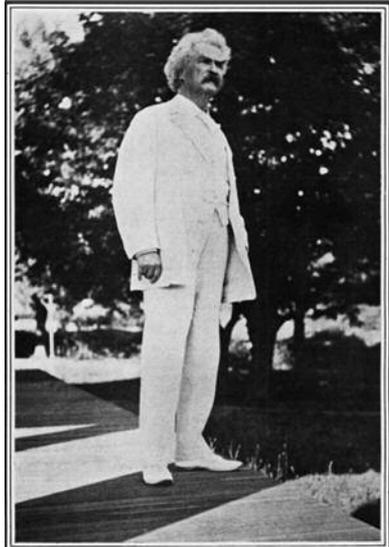
Though the extensive press coverage pleased him, Twain wasn’t merely showing off. He had serious business to conduct at the hearing, where he wanted to urge legislators to change the system of copyright law, which he considered archaic and unjust. It was a subject close to his heart.

This photograph appeared in *Harper’s Monthly* with the following caption:

Clothes and the Man
Mark Twain in a suit of the white clothing which he champions as the best and most agreeable for daily use.

“Light-colored clothing is more pleasing to the eye and enlivens the spirit. Now, of course, I cannot compel every one to wear such clothing just for my especial benefit, so I do the next best thing and wear it myself.”

~Mark Twain quoted in
the *New York Times*,
December 8, 1906



Public Domain

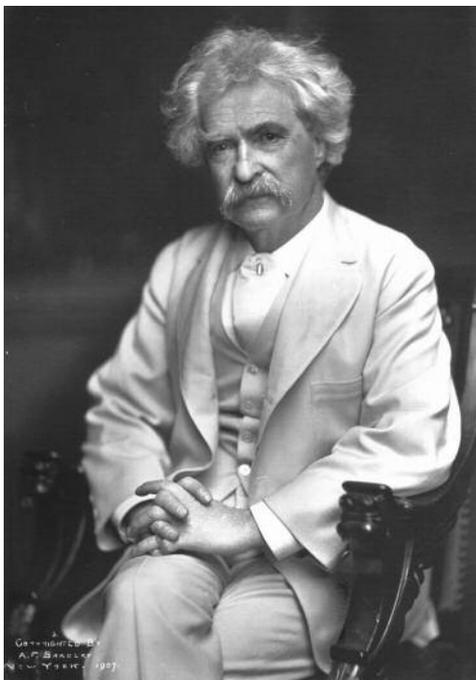
For years he had been fighting to improve the system, but now he regarded the problem with a greater sense of urgency. His long career was nearing its end, and the future of his life's work was at stake.

In the twilight of his career, Twain was making visual what his friends had long accepted as factual—that he was one of a kind, an American original who would be talked about long after he was gone, and whose works would surely last as long as the Library of Congress itself. He could dress in white and get away with it because he was Mark Twain, and that was the only excuse he needed. As he had explained to a New York audience earlier in the year, “I was born modest, but it didn’t last.”

Wearing white at his age was a kind of joke on death—a playful way of pretending that it had little power over him, and that he wouldn’t submit to it until he was good and ready. Determined not to waste his last years in a dreary shuffle toward extinction, he wanted to go out in the grand fashion of a man who had made a deep impression on the world, and who was convinced that nothing about him—including the manner of his passing—would be forgotten.

For the rest of his life he made a point of wearing the white suit as often as possible. He said that dark clothes were depressing. “When I put on black,” he declared, “it reminds me of my funerals. I could be satisfied with white all the year round.”

Though his literary career was largely at an end, he wanted to use all the creative force remaining in him to put the finishing touches on a life as complex and dazzling as anything in his fiction. As William Dean Howells remarked of these final years, “His literature grew less and less and his life more and more.” Twain was aware that his new look made an unforgettable illustration of his own star appeal. The Man in White was not only an entertaining sight, but one that seemed to require comment. He was a cigar-store angel come to life, with a mischievous eye on this world, and a curious one on the next. Such a figure furnished a spectacle that was both comic and tragic, a spirited celebration of life’s rewards and a clown’s lament of his own mortality.



Mark Twain, 1907

© Library of Congress

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. Why was Twain content to dictate his autobiography?
2. How did Twain create a sensation at the Library of Congress?
3. How did Twain hope to play a joke on death?

Suggested Reading

Shelden, Michael. *Mark Twain, Man in White: The Grand Adventure of His Final Years*. New York: Random House, 2010.

Recorded Books

Shelden, Michael. *Mark Twain: Man in White: The Grand Adventure of His Final Years*. Narrated by Andrew Garman. Prince Frederick, MD: Recorded Books, LLC, 2010.

Websites of Interest

The *Twainquotes* website provides the reprint of an article from the December 8, 1906, issue of the *New York Times* entitled “Mark Twain in White Amuses Congressmen.” — <http://www.twainquotes.com/19061208.html>

Lecture 14

The Grand Farewell, 1908–1910

The Suggested Reading for this lecture is **Mark Twain's *Is Shakespeare Dead?***

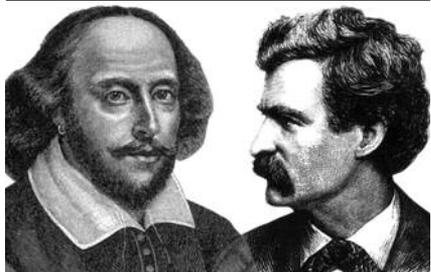
The last important work that Twain completed in his life is one that isn't widely known, but deserves attention because in many ways it represents a summing up of his life. Written and published in 1909, *Is Shakespeare Dead?* is ostensibly about the great English poet and playwright, but its real subject is Mark Twain, because the short work tells us much more about him than Shakespeare. In fact, he didn't really believe that the Stratford actor wrote the plays attributed to him. By casting doubt on the authorship question, he wanted to make the case for his own fame as a writer whose contributions to American literature would stand the test of time.

The title he gave to his short volume on Shakespeare echoes a question asked in jest in his first major book, *The Innocents Abroad*. As a way of teasing earnest tour guides in Europe, Twain and some of his companions from the *Quaker City* would often pretend to be much more innocent than they seemed. The aim was to make even the most confident guides react to their bogus question with dropped jaws and bewildered stares. "After they have exhausted their enthusiasm pointing out to us and praising the beauties of some ancient bronze image or broken-legged statue, we look at it stupidly and in silence for five, ten, fifteen minutes—as long as we can hold out, in fact—and then ask: 'Is—is he dead?' That conquers the serenest of them. It is not what they are looking for."

He was under no illusion that he might change the accepted view of Shakespeare. For much of the English-speaking world, doubting the existence of Shakespeare the playwright was like doubting the existence of the sun or the moon. "Am I trying to convince anybody that Shakespeare

"How curious and interesting is the parallel—as far as poverty of biographical details is concerned—between Satan and Shakespeare. . . . They are the best-known unknown persons that have ever drawn breath upon the planet."

~Mark Twain,
Is Shakespeare Dead?



did not write Shakespeare's Works?" asks Twain in his book. "Ah, now, what do you take me for? Would I be so soft as that, after having known the human race familiarly for nearly seventy-four years? It would grieve me to know that any one could think so injuriously of me . . . No-no, I am aware that when even the brightest mind in our world has been trained up from childhood in a superstition of any kind, it will never be possible for that mind, in its maturity, to examine sincerely, dispassionately, and conscientiously any evidence or any circumstance which shall seem to cast a doubt upon the validity of that superstition."

For Twain, the main purpose of his book wasn't to score points in the authorship debate, but to show off his talents for an art he had mastered long ago—the art of irreverence. One of the best chapters is called "Irreverence," and nicely illustrates why butchering a sacred cow now and then is not only necessary, but sometimes noble. First, however, Twain reminds his readers that most people—including himself—think irreverence is fine so long as it's directed against someone else's sacred cow. "When a thing is sacred to me," he explains, "it is impossible for me to be irreverent toward it. I cannot call to mind a single instance where I have ever been irreverent, except toward the things which were sacred to other people."

Twain takes his most irreverent swipe at Shakespeare when he compares their literary careers and argues that his has been much better managed. If Shakespeare was Shakespeare, then he didn't properly promote his career, Twain suggests. Instead of making sure that the world knew more about him, the playwright was so careless of his fame that he left behind only "a vague file of chipmunk-tracks stringing through the dust of Stratford." In the years after he retired from the London stage, he should have had ample time to do what Twain was doing in retirement—making sure the world knew what manner of man had created so much great literature.

But the fact that even the people of his own hometown didn't seem to know the details of Shakespeare's career is enough to suggest to Twain that the actor didn't write the plays. To prove his point, he asks readers to consider what would happen if they went looking for information about Mark Twain in Hannibal. "I am away along in life—my seventy-third year being already well behind me—yet sixteen of my Hannibal schoolmates are still alive to-day, and can tell—and do tell—inquirers dozens and dozens of incidents of their young lives and mine together."

As he knew from his biographer's research, there was no end to the number of people who could give you firsthand information about Mark Twain. As he proudly states, "On the few surviving steamboats—those lingering ghosts and remembrancers of great fleets that plied the big river in the beginning of my water-career—which is exactly as long ago as the whole invoice of the life-years of Shakespeare number—there are still findable two or three river-pilots who saw me do creditable things in those ancient days . . . They know about

me, and can tell. And so do printers, from St. Louis to New York; and so do newspaper reporters, from Nevada to San Francisco. And so do the police. If Shakespeare had really been celebrated, like me, Stratford could have told things about him; and if my experience goes for anything, they'd have done it."



© John Stobart

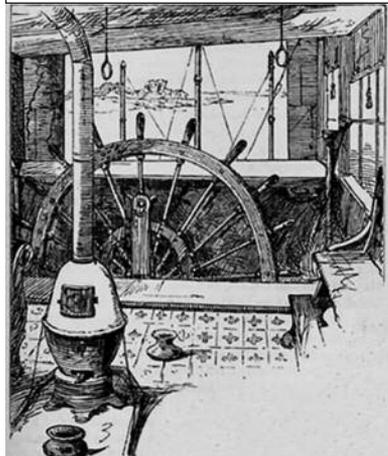
A painting of Hannibal, Missouri, ca. 1841, by John Stobart based on descriptions by Mark Twain.

To critics who say it's the work that matters, not the author's life, Twain answers that both matter. He wanted the world never to forget what he had done to become a writer, and how he had lived as a writer. His books were not written in a vacuum. They were the products of a man with specific experiences and characteristics, and Twain was as proud of his life as he was of his works. The best passages in *Is Shakespeare Dead?* are not about the famous playwright's life, but about Twain's. They tell of the ways in which experience informed his writing. The kind of life he has lived, he says, is reflected in what he writes and how he writes.

Though he had not worked as a miner in more than forty years, he claims to have remembered all the relevant details of the business, and his descriptions of it glow with a youthful exuberance. "I have been a 'pocket' miner—a sort of gold mining not findable in any but one little spot in the world, so far as I know. I know how, with horn and water, to find the trail of a pocket and trace it step by step and stage by stage up the mountain to its source, and find the compact little nest of yellow metal reposing in its secret home under the ground. I know the language of that trade, that capricious trade, that fascinating buried-treasure trade, and can catch

"Experience is an author's most valuable asset; experience is the thing that puts the muscle and the breath and the warm blood into the book he writes."

~Mark Twain,
Is Shakespeare Dead?



Public domain courtesy of Project Gutenberg

any writer who tries to use it without having learned it by the sweat of his brow and the labor of his hands.”

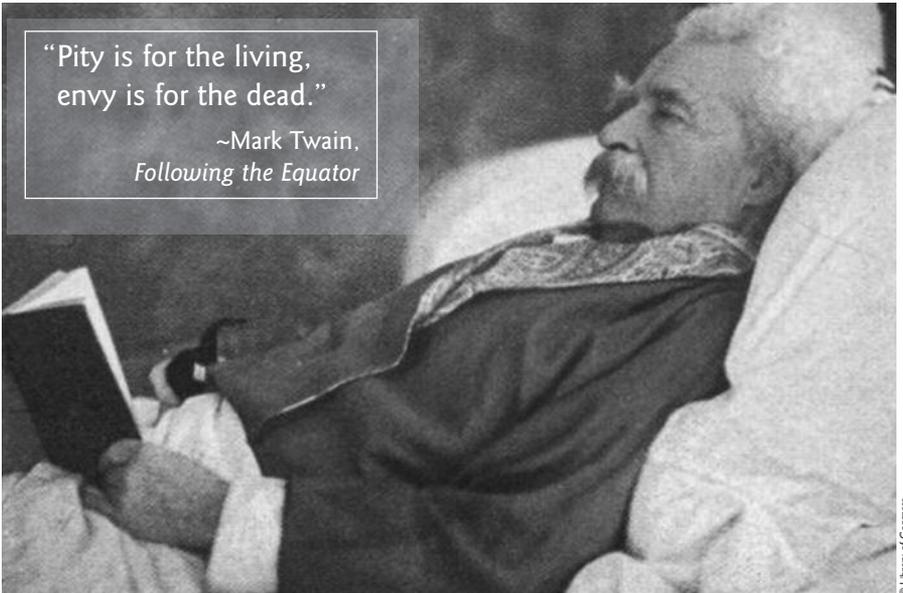
Twain wants evidence of a Shakespeare with the sweaty brow and calloused hands of a man with real knowledge of specific things featured prominently in the plays: for example, “soldiership and soldier-ways and soldier-talk, and generalship and general-ways and general-talk, and seamanship and sailor-ways and sailor-talk.” At the very least, he wants evidence that the actor Shakespeare “frollicked in the law-courts for recreation,” and that he somehow picked up enough legal knowledge to sound expert on the subject, as the playwright does.

Of course, what he wanted was a Shakespeare who resembled Mark Twain—a largely self-educated writer of humble origins who came of age in a bucolic river village, and who went off one day to find adventure in wild places, then moved to a big city and used his wit, imagination, and experience to conquer the world, and who succeeded beyond all measure, and who retired from the limelight to savor his triumph and burnish his legacy. Writing *Is Shakespeare Dead?* gave Twain the chance to speculate on the nature of his own posthumous fame. And what he found was reassuring. Though he didn’t have a *Hamlet* or a *Macbeth* to his credit, the story of his life was second to none, and the literature that had flowed from it was pretty good, too.

Almost exactly one year after his little book on Shakespeare was published, Mark Twain died. It was April 21, 1910, and he was seven months shy of his seventy-fifth birthday.

“Pity is for the living,
envy is for the dead.”

~Mark Twain,
Following the Equator



Mark Twain in bed reading, 1908.

FOR GREATER UNDERSTANDING

Questions

1. What is the origin of the title for Mark Twain's last major book?
2. Why was Twain so proud of the fact that he had left behind him a long and dense trail of biographical information?
3. Why was Twain so good at the art of irreverence?

Suggested Reading

Twain, Mark. *Is Shakespeare Dead?* New York: General Books, LLC, 2009 (1909).

Other Books of Interest

Camfield, Gregg, ed. *The Oxford Companion to Mark Twain*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2003.

Websites of Interest

1. Mark Twain's stays in Bermuda are chronicled at the Bermuda Online website in a section titled "Mark Twain and Bermuda." —
<http://www.bermuda-online.org/twain.htm>
2. *The Official Australian Mark Twain Society*. —
<http://www.marktwain.com.au/pages/news.html>
3. *The Japan Mark Twain Society*. — <http://twaine.seesaa.net>
4. The Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, annually awards the Mark Twain Prize for American Humor. —
<http://www.kennedy-center.org/programs/specialevents/marktwain/#about>
5. The Mark Twain International School in Bucharest, Romania, is "distinguished from other schools by its bilingual education, internationalist philosophy and exceptional results in offering its students a complete education." —
<http://marktwainschool.ro/english>

A MARK TWAIN TIMELINE

- 1835 Born in Florida, Missouri. Halley's comet is visible from Earth.
- 1839 Moves to Hannibal, Missouri, which later serves as the model town for Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn.
- 1847 Father dies, leaving family in difficult circumstances.
- 1851 Begins work as a journeyman printer with the *Hannibal Gazette*. Publishes first sketches.
- 1853 Visits St. Louis, New York, and Philadelphia as an itinerant printer.
- 1857 Becomes a cub-pilot for Horace Bixby. Spends the next two years "learning" the river, later described in *Life on the Mississippi*.
- 1858 Brother Henry killed in steamboat accident on the *Pennsylvania*.
- 1861 Civil War breaks out, halting river trade. Clemens served with a Missouri militia, then moves to Nevada with his brother Orion.
- 1862 Travels around Nevada and California. Takes job as a reporter for the *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*.
- 1863 Forced to leave Nevada for breaking dueling laws. Prospects in Calaveras County, then settles in San Francisco. Writes for magazines and newspapers.
- 1865 Writes "Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog." Wins notice in Eastern magazines.
- 1866 Takes a trip to Hawaii as a correspondent of the *Sacramento Alta Californian*. Reports on shipwreck of the *Hornet*. Gives first public lecture.
- 1867 Travels as correspondent to Europe and the Holy Land on the *Quaker City*. Sees a picture of Olivia Langdon (Livy). Publishes *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County, and Other Sketches*. Sales are light.
- 1868 Lectures across the United States. Meets and falls in love with Livy in Elmira, New York.
- 1869 Engaged to Livy. *The Innocents Abroad* is published as a subscription book. It's an instant best-seller.
- 1870 Marries Livy in Elmira. Her father buys them a house in Buffalo, New York. Their son Langdon is born.
- 1872 Moves with Livy to Hartford. Publishes *Roughing It*. Daughter Susy is born, and son Langdon dies.
- 1873 Invents and patents *Mark Twain's Self-Pasting Scrapbook*. Publishes *The Gilded Age*.
- 1874 Daughter Clara is born. Moves into fanciful Nook Farm house in Hartford.
- 1876 Publishes *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.
- 1880 Begins investment in the Paige typesetter. Publishes *A Tramp Abroad*. Daughter Jean is born.



Halley's comet's 1835 visit was documented by an Irish illustrator as it appeared over the city of Cork.

- 1881 Publishes *The Prince and the Pauper*. Pays for Karl Gerhardt to go to Europe to study sculpture.
- 1883 Publishes *Life on the Mississippi*.
- 1884 Publishes *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in London. American edition comes out the next year. Founds own publishing company, Charles L. Webster & Co.
- 1885 Clemens turns 50. Publishes the memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant, which is now considered a literary classic.
- 1889 Publishes *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, which is widely panned.
- 1890 Buys all rights in the Paige typesetter. His mother Jane Lampton Clemens dies.
- 1891 Leaves Hartford to live in Europe because of financial difficulties.
- 1894 Publishes *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. Charles L. Webster & Co. fails. Effectively bankrupt. Gives power of attorney to Henry Huttleston Rogers.
- 1895 Goes on worldwide lecture tour to restore finances.
- 1896 Continues to lecture around the world. Daughter Susy dies.
- 1898 Finishes paying off creditors.
- 1902 Livy falls seriously ill.
- 1904 Livy dies. Twain begins dictating his autobiography. Moves to New York City.
- 1905 Guest of Teddy Roosevelt at White House. Banquet for his seventieth birthday at Delmonico's in New York.
- 1906 Speaks frequently. Addresses congressional committee on copyright issues. Begins wearing white suit. His official biographer Albert Bigelow Paine moves in. Daughter Jean committed to an institution.
- 1908 Moves into "Stormfield" in Redding, Connecticut. Forms the "Angelfish Club" for young girls.
- 1909 Daughter Jean dies at Stormfield.
- 1910 Visits Bermuda for the last time. Twain dies at Stormfield and is buried in Elmira. Halley's comet is once again visible from Earth.



Halley's comet was photographed as it appeared inbound toward Earth in 1910.

ADAPTATIONS

Mark Twain's works have been adapted many times since they were first published. Beside inspiring other literary works, they have been made into movies, cartoons, television series, plays, and musicals, and they have been performed as street dramas around the world. Below is a sampling of the adaptations.

Huckleberry Finn (1920). A silent movie starring Lewis Sargent as Huck and Gordon Griffith as Tom Sawyer.

Huckleberry Finn (1931). First "talkie" film, with Junior Durkin as Huck and Jackie Coogan as Tom.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1939). Mickey Rooney starred as Huck Finn.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1954). A film starring Thomas Mitchell and John Carradine produced by CBS.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1960). A film with Eddie Hodges as Huck, Archie Moore as Jim, and Tony Randall as the King of France.

The New Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1968). An animated television series for children.

Hopelessly Lost (1973). A Soviet adventure comedy directed by Georgi Daneliya based on Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Huckleberry Finn (1974). A movie produced by *Reader's Digest* and Arthur P. Jacobs starring Jeff East as Huckleberry Finn and Paul Winfield as Jim.

Huckleberry Finn (1975). An ABC movie of the week with Ron Howard as Huck Finn.

Huckleberry no Bouken. An anime series based on Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. It is the first of two Huckleberry Finn anime.

Huckleberry Finn and His Friends (1979). A television series starring Ian Tracey.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1981). A television series starring Kurt Ida as Huckleberry Finn.

The Adventures of Con Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn (1985). An ABC movie of the week with Drew Barrymore as Con Sawyer.

The Adventures of Huck Finn (1993). A film starring Elijah Wood and Courtney B. Vance.

Tom Sawyer (1907). A silent film made by Kalem Studios in New York City. It was the first time Twain's character had appeared on film.

Tom Sawyer (1917). A silent film starring Jack Pickford, Robert Gordon, and Clara Horton.

- Tom Sawyer** (1930). The film was the third screen adaptation of the Twain novel. It was made on location at the Paramount Ranch in Agoura, California.
- The Adventures of Tom Sawyer** (1938). This version starred Tommy Kelly in the title role with Walter Brennan as Muff Potter.
- Tom Sawyer** (1973). Johnny Whitaker is Tom, and Jodie Foster played Becky.
- Tom and Huck** (1995). A Disney live action film starring television actor Jonathan Taylor Thomas as Tom.
- The Modern Adventures of Tom Sawyer** (1999). A California skate park and Erik Estrada are featured.
- A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court** (1921). A silent film adaptation starring Harry Myers as Henry.
- A Connecticut Yankee** (1931). The first "talkie" adaptation. Will Rogers plays Henry Morgan, Myrna Loy is Morgan le Fay, and Brandon Hurst is Merlin.
- A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court** (1949). Title roles in this Paramount musical adaptation are filled by such stars as Bing Crosby, Rhonda Fleming, and William Bendix.
- A Kid in King Arthur's Court** (1995). Actor Thomas Ian Nicholas is pulled into King Arthur's Court by Merlin (Ron Moody). Actress Kate Winslet (*Titanic*) and Daniel Craig (who played James Bond) are also featured.
- A Young Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court** (1995). Guitar-playing seventeen-year-old Hank (Philippe Ross) deals with Merlin (Michael York) in this Disney television movie.
- A Knight in Camelot** (1998). A computer malfunction causes a science researcher (Whoopi Goldberg) to be sent back in time with her laptop.
- Arthur's Quest** (1999). A television movie with a reversed scenario: To escape the clutches of the evil warrior and sorceress Morgana, Merlin transports young King Arthur into modern-day America.
- The Innocents Abroad** (1984). A PBS "Great Performances" adaptation of Twain's novel starring David Ogden Stiers (of television's *M*A*S*H* fame).
- The Mysterious Stranger** (1982). Made-for-TV movie about a young printer's apprentice who imagines himself back in the days of Gutenberg helping to print the Bible.
- The Prince and the Pauper** (1937). The Warner Bros. film starred Errol Flynn, Claude Rains, and twins Billy and Bobby Mauch in the title roles.
- The Prince and the Pauper** (1962). A three-part television series on *Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color*.
- The Prince and the Pauper** (1978). Raquel Welch, Oliver Reed, and Ernest Borgnine are among the stars in this 20th Century Fox version.
- The Prince and the Pauper** (2001). Made for television movie starring Aidan Quinn and Jonathan Timmins.

COURSE MATERIALS

Suggested Readings

- Paine, Albert Bigelow. *Mark Twain, a Biography: Volume I, Part I: 1835–1866*. Memphis: General Books LLC, 2010 (1912).
- Twain, Mark. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Norton Critical ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999 (1885).
- . *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982 (1876).
- . *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*. Ed. Charles Neider. New York: Harper Perennial, 2000 (1990).
- . *Collected Tales, Sketches, Speeches & Essays, Volume I: 1852–1890*. Ed. Louis J. Budd. New York: Library of America, 1992.
- . *Collected Tales, Sketches, Speeches and Essays: Volume 2: 1891–1910*. Ed. Louis J. Budd. New York: Library of America, 1992.
- . *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. Norton Critical Edition. New York: W.W. Norton, 1982 (1889).
- . *Following the Equator*. New York: Library of America, 2010 (1897).
- . *The Innocents Abroad*. New York: Signet Classics, 2007 (1869).
- . *Is Shakespeare Dead?* New York: General Books, LLC, 2009 (1909).
- . *Life on the Mississippi*. Intro. Jonathan Raban. New York: Library of America, 2009.
- . *Roughing It*. Mark Twain Library. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002 (1872).
- . *Mark Twain's Weapons of Satire: Anti-Imperialist Writings on the Philippine-American War*. Ed. Jim Zwick. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992.
- Shelden, Michael. *Mark Twain: Man in White: The Grand Adventure of His Final Years*. New York: Random House, 2010.

Other Books of Interest

- Bush, Harold K., Jr. *Mark Twain and the Spiritual Crisis of His Age*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007.
- Camfield, Gregg, ed. *The Oxford Companion to Mark Twain*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2003.
- Chadwick-Joshua, Jocelyn. *The Jim Dilemma: Reading Race in Huckleberry Finn*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1998.
- Clemens, Susy. *Papa: An Intimate Biography of Mark Twain*. New York: Doubleday Books, 1988.

- Courtney, Steve. *Joseph Hopkins Twichell: The Life and Times of Mark Twain's Closest Friend*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008.
- Cox, James M. *Mark Twain: The Fate of Humor*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966.
- Dempsey, Terrell. *Searching for Jim: Slavery in Sam Clemens's World*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003.
- Dolmetsch, Carl. "Our Famous Guest": *Mark Twain in Vienna*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992.
- Emerson, Everett. *Mark Twain: A Literary Life*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000.
- Messent, Peter. *Mark Twain and Male Friendship: The Twichell, Howells, and Rogers Friendships*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2009.
- Michelson, Bruce. *Printer's Devil: Mark Twain and the American Publishing Revolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.
- Seelye, John D. *Mark Twain in the Movies: A Meditation with Pictures*. New York: Viking Press, 1977.
- Twain, Mark. *Mark Twain's Correspondence with Henry Huttleston Rogers, 1893–1909*. Ed. Lewis Leary. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.
- Ward, Geoffrey C., and Dayton Duncan. *Mark Twain*. New York: Knopf, 2001.
- Wecter, Dixon. *Sam Clemens of Hannibal: The Formative Years of America's Great Indigenous Writer*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961 (1952).

Recorded Books

- Shelden, Michael. *Mark Twain: Man in White: The Grand Adventure of His Final Years*. Narrated by Andrew Garman. Prince Frederick, MD: Recorded Books, LLC, 2010.

Other Books by Michael Shelden

- Shelden, Michael. *Friends of Promise: Cyril Connolly and the World of Horizon*. New York: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1989.
- . *George Orwell: Ten "Animal Farm" Letters to His Agent, Leonard Moore*. Bloomington, IN: The Private Press of Fredric Brewer, 1984.
- . *Graham Greene: The Enemy Within*. New York: Random House, 1995.
- . *Orwell: The Authorized Biography*. New York: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1991.

These books are available online through www.modernscholar.com or by calling Recorded Books at 1-800-636-3399.



A Recorded Books Production
www.modernscholar.com • 1-800-636-3399