

THE PAIN ECONOMY: MARK TWAIN'S INVESTMENT IN PAIN

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Abstract

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Mark Twain's humor draws our eye to scenes of humiliation, physical injury, loss, and suffering. While there is no doubt whether Twain is a successful humorist, the question remains why pain features so prominently in his writing. This dissertation brings together humor studies, masochism research, and literary scholarship to demonstrate how pain becomes currency—characters trade insult for injury, suffering is rewarded with sudden windfalls, and even the reader-author relationship is charged with the exchange of pain.

Within the pain economy, taking an interest in pain is commercial good sense, not a sign of neurosis. Mark Twain's creative work is underwritten by the fruitful exchange of pain and pleasure. His natural inclination towards guilt and his ceaseless return to suffering become profitable endeavors. Drawn into the exchange through their pleasure, Twain's readers will be asked to share in the cost—either through monetary payment for the text or through some contribution of pain.

The pain economy also comes to represent the ultimate moral measurement for Twain. He lambasts churches, governments, and other social institutions for their failure to provide a balance between pain and payoff for those that fall within their purview. For Twain, morality is defined almost entirely by the exchange of pleasure and pain. His moral heroes are those who suffer without complaint and for the good of others; his villains, any who make their way in the world by exploiting other people's pain personal gain.

God provides Twain with his most powerful and exploitative villain, but in an ironic turn, Twain comes to resemble the villain he most despises. As an author, Twain creates an inescapable reality in which his characters suffer at his behest and for his benefit. Through his imitative authorship, Twain reveals the fact that all realities are merely creations of an authorial mind. Although this idea draws dangerously near the void of nihilism, Twain invites his readers to remain within the fiction through investment in the pain economy.

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List of Abbreviations

<i>A1</i>	<i>Autobiography of Mark Twain, Vol. 1</i>	Mark Twain
<i>A2</i>	<i>Autobiography of Mark Twain, Vol. 2</i>	Mark Twain
<i>BA</i>	<i>The Bible According to Mark Twain</i>	Mark Twain
<i>FE</i>	<i>Following the Equator</i>	Mark Twain
<i>HF</i>	<i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i>	Mark Twain
HNB	“Mark Twain and Human Nature” (Blackwell)	Tom Quirk
<i>LL</i>	<i>The Love Letters of Mark Twain</i>	Mark Twain
<i>MTHN</i>	<i>Mark Twain and Human Nature</i>	Tom Quirk
<i>PRJA</i>	<i>Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc</i>	Mark Twain
RR	“Reflections on Religion”	Mark Twain
WM	“What Is Man?”	Mark Twain

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Introduction

Painful Humor and the Pleasure of Pain

“Everything human is pathetic,” Mark Twain declares in his last travel book, *Following the Equator* (489). By the time these words reached print, Susy, Twain’s beloved daughter, had died suddenly and terribly from meningitis; he and his family had undertaken a very public pauper’s mission to pay back their creditors; America’s boyish jokester was aging, and his right arm hurt him mercilessly when he wrote; furthermore, the “damned human race”—greedy and violent—was getting on his last nerve. But Mark Twain was prepared. He knew what to do with a surplus of pain. Twain follows up his initial reflection thus: “The secret source of Humor itself is not joy but sorrow. There is no humor in heaven.” Heaven, humorless and painless, was likely a fairytale, but pain and humor? Those were certainties. Mark Twain had come into fortune and fame as a humorist, a professional pain broker. He gathered suffering to him—his own physical and psychological pain, family deaths and financial embarrassments, the many trials and tribulations of his characters, both invented and observed—and he traded it in for pleasure, for justice, and for righteousness. He was a master of the pain economy.¹ Within the pain economy,

¹ This phrase, which I will use repeatedly throughout this dissertation, bears an unintended (though not totally unwelcome or meaningless) resemblance to W. D.

pain is capital. There is a single rule of the pain-pleasure exchange: balance. Pain suffered is deserving of payoff, and pleasure must be paid for in a like measure of pain. The dynamic exchange of pain and pleasure energizes Twain's writing and his humor.

Twain's "bitter" old age, his obsession with guilt and humiliation, and his pessimism-cum-determinism create a dissonant note for those who esteem Mark Twain as the heart of American humor—wise, lazy, and genial. An aging Twain, steeped in despair and spouting ire, is difficult to reconcile with the avuncular, cigar-wielding Twain of Hollywood and postage stamps. Scholars diverge in their attempts to explain this divided personality—some argue that Twain's rancorous old age represents a break from his sometime sanguinity, while others contend that the good-humored Twain was only ever a myth. In truth, Twain does not make it easy to tease apart the threads of hope, laughter, sarcasm, despair, pain and sorrow in his work. His readers wrestle with the implications. Is the profound darkness of Twain's humor and philosophy—his obsession with his own guilt and the suffering of humanity—evidence of a personal depression or a moral nihilism? Forrest G. Robinson argues that Twain struggled with a truly destructive emotional impulse at times. Twain's late published works, Robinson says, are outwardly moral, but the "heat of anger" in them is self-immolating; he burns everything to the ground, making reform and redemption impossible ("Dreaming" 451). Even Howells, whose

Howells' "economy of pain" (from *The Rise of Silas Lapham*). There is, undoubtedly, room for comparison between the two authors, but that is not my project here.

My Mark Twain is the epitome of loving apologism, had to acknowledge Twain's attraction to self-accusation:

At the last day he will not have to confess anything, for all his life was the free knowledge of any one who would ask him of it. The Searcher of hearts will not bring him to shame at that day, for he did not try to hide any of the things for which he was often so bitterly sorry. (100)

Although Howells paints Twain's self-condemnation as a virtue, it is easy to read between the lines to a darker, more complicated story.

Twain was not seeking to redeem himself but to revel in an exaggerated culpability. He pursued pain for pain's sake. At first blush, this pain-seeking compulsion appears almost pathological. The pain economy, however, allows that Twain's attraction to guilt, humiliation, and suffering was a means of building up pain capital to fund his writing effort. Perhaps, viewed in this way, the whole scene looks a bit less neurotic. Pain, whether manifesting as self-inflicted guilt or delivered through the "slings and arrows" of human life, was not a roadblock to Twain's creative energies or a challenge to his morality but the source of them both. Pain was the currency of his creativity and his primary measure of moral rectitude.

The question of morality is an important one and will receive concentrated attention in later chapters. "Moral systems are interlocking sets of values, virtues, norms, practices, identities, institutions, technologies, and evolved psychological mechanisms that work together to suppress or regulate self-interest and make cooperative societies possible," writes moral psychologist Jonathan Haidt (270). Judging by the outcomes in the pain economy Twain found the existing moral systems of his time—primarily those preached by capitalist American Christians—

unsatisfactory. Asking people to suffer patiently, to praise God for meager blessings, to trust a corruptible government for justice, to watch their fortunes rise and fall with the powerful elite, to stake their reward in the dubious hereafter—this inevitably results in a pain imbalance. Twain’s idea of morality is nothing radical. He looks for an even distribution of hurt and benefit. This rigorous division between right and wrong speaks to Twain’s membership in an “individualistic, rule-based, and universalist” Western culture that, says Haidt, scorns “mere convention” as a measure of morality and seeks a more measurable morality (97, 17). Haidt sets out five “foundations” of human morality, each emphasized more or less by different groups: Care/harm, Fairness/cheating (he later adds Liberty/oppression to this idea), Loyalty/betrayal, Authority/subversion, and Sanctity/degradation (125). Liberal Westerners, Haidt argues, define morality almost exclusive by the first two foundations. The pain economy draws that moral line precisely, ignoring all other considerations if a pain balance is not first achieved. If pain and pleasure are not balanced, no other moral considerations matter—not loyalty, not authority, not sanctity.

That is not to say that the other moral foundations were irrelevant to Twain, personally or professionally. The nineteenth-century author was expected to edify his reader, morally and intellectually. “[N]ineteenth-century Americans were highly sensitive to the performance element in public interaction,” writes Susan K. Harris, “judging each other (as well as foreigners) on the ability to *manifest* ‘American’ values” (*God’s Arbiters* 44). The idea of the American Christian may not have

reflected the subtle realities of the beliefs and practices of the American public, but it was a powerful idea nonetheless. The prototypical “American Christian,” Harris explains, emerges from historical constructs fusing Puritan orthodoxy and strident nationalism (“Christian Mission” 39). Thus, an exaggerated Christian morality defined “proper” discourse. Twain wrestled with the American Christian ideal. On the one hand, he felt obligated to perform his role as moralist-author, performing American Protestant values for his public. On the other hand, even though he had never really been a proper Christian, he resented the failure of American Christianity to purify American society. Thus, with a kind of boyish mischief, Twain cavorted within the role of moralist.

In his seventieth birthday speech, Twain describes, tongue-in-cheek, the moral pinnacle of old age: “The seventieth birthday! It is the time of life when you arrive at a new and awful dignity; when you may throw aside the decent reserves which have oppressed you for a generation and stand unafraid and unabashed upon your seven-terraced summit and look down and teach—unrebuked” (A1 659). Despite an air of carelessness, Twain brings his audience back to their depravity with full force. “Every man is born crammed with sin microbes,” he tells his birthday guests, but he also offers a way out. At seventy, the author claims, he has outlived “the Scriptural statute of limitations” (661). He simultaneously accepts and rejects the moralist’s role.

Twain’s pseudo-pious ambition to “excite the laughter of God’s creatures” (“SLC to Orion”) gives him the cover he needs to engage the pain economy under the

guise of social acceptability. Humor, even when rooted in pain and darkness, covers a multitude of social sins. In *Proper Mark Twain*, Leland Krauth suggests that Twain's desire for social approval urged him to construct connections between humor and more "serious" subjects—such as human suffering. And while I largely agree with Krauth's argument, I suspect Twain was not inventing a relationship between pain, humor, and morality for propriety's sake alone but was, in a sense, gentrifying a visceral human urge to engage pain through humor. Twain is not speaking only out of concern for his social acceptability when he says,

I maintain that a man can never be a humorist, in thought or in deed, until he can feel the springs of pathos. Indeed, there you have a basis of something material to go upon in trying to comprehend what this impalpable thing of true humor is. Trust me, he was never yet properly funny who was not capable at times of being very serious. And more: the two are as often as not simultaneous. (qtd. in Krauth 11)

Pathos and humor were valued differently within the cultural hierarchy of nineteenth-century America, but in Twain's works they are inextricable. The relationship between the two is neither coincidental nor contrived. Twain's creative energies are funded by his investment in pain.

Like any good artist, Twain reflects the complicated nature of the world in which he writes. His humor can cause pain as easily as relieve it. The pain economy is liquid, the currency in constant exchange. Pain's exact value is difficult to determine, but it has long been an object of interest, even desire, for human beings. From gleefully picking a scab to the sexual gratification sought through whipping or humiliation, the enjoyment of pain is a familiar—if sometimes unconventional—

practice. Without doubt, people are *interested* in pain—both their own and others’—and are often able to take pleasure from it. Twain was ready and willing to capitalize on that interest.

Twain peddles his stories of pain with only a perfunctory apology to the sensitive reader. About to launch into a description of one man’s exceptional tolerance for physical pain, Twain writes, “Do not read the following instances if horrors are not pleasant to you” (*FE* 553). It’s a fair warning. The stories that follow this warning are rife with pleasurable pain: living bodies plunged into fire, limbs amputated, and so on. So what made Twain think it would be pleasant for anyone? Perhaps his confidence came from the fact that *he* found pleasure in stories like these. “[The third story] is my favorite,” Twain confesses. “Whenever I read it I seem to enjoy all that the patient enjoyed—whatever it was” (554). The vignette that follows depicts a man who amputates his own leg in a fire, hobbles ninety-six miles on the stump to see a doctor, and subsequently discards the false leg he acquires because he finds it inconvenient. Twain doesn’t need to define what, exactly, that man’s enjoyment was in his pain. He could see that the man’s pain was valuable, not only to the man himself but to Twain’s readers as well. “We all like to see people in trouble if it doesn’t cost us anything,” Twain writes (*FE* 713). But maybe it does cost us something. The intricacies of the pain-pleasure exchange form the backbone of this study. As the human race processes its transactions of pain for pleasure (and pleasure for pain), the author stands ready with his tally sheet to track the debtors and creditors, and, when necessary, to set the accounts straight.

Entering the Pain Economy

I am arguing that Mark Twain's creative efforts are underwritten by his investment in pain. It is therefore necessary to explore how the pain economy works. Pain is a kind of commodity currency that Twain trusts his readers will accept. For the select few, pain can be enjoyed on its own, but the rest will trade for something more desirable. Suffering comes in many different forms, however. Staci Newmahr, a researcher within the SM scene, distinguishes between "pain," "hurt," and "harm." In the pain economy, "pain" and "hurt" are the most easily commodified; only "harm" implies an unredeemable permanence, impossible to exchange for pleasure. Bodily suffering demands our attention, animating our primitive impulses in ways we can't fully control or understand. This kind of pain brings the artist into immediate communication with her body and psychology (Lunn, "Pathos" 29-30). The human body was an uncomfortable subject, to say the least, for nineteenth century readers, but even as physical pain draws our attention to the body, it paradoxically distances us from it, making the body an object of intellectual study. As philosopher Simon Critchley puts it, "In pain, I attempt to take a distance from my body, externalize the discomfort and insulate myself in thought" (*On Humour* 42). This distance is enough to permit the exchanges of the pain economy. Twain demonstrates a distanced exchange of physical pain in "Down the Rhône." With a mock-scientific intellectuality, Twain records his thoughts from the dentist's chair as he has a tooth drilled:

It is believed by people generally—or at least by many—that the exquisitely sharp sensation which results from plunging the steel point into the raw nerve is pain, but I think that this is doubtful. It is so vivid and sudden that one has no time to examine properly into its character. It is probably impossible, with our human limitations, to determine with certainty whether a sensation of so high and perfect an order as that is pain or whether it is pleasure. . . . I have every confidence that I can eventually prove to everyone's satisfaction that a nerve-stab produces pleasure; and not only that, but the most exquisite pleasure, the most perfect felicity which we are capable of feeling. (1025-26)

Twain recognizes that converting pain to pleasure is an extraordinarily valuable activity. “I could would not ask more,” the author proclaims, “than to be remembered hereafter as the man who conferred this priceless benefaction upon his race” (1026). But, of course, Twain hasn’t been able to transform the pain of a root canal into purest pleasure—at least not immediately. But he may still hope for our eternal gratitude, because he *does* let us turn our pain to pleasure if we suffer it first first. Otherwise, we would have nothing to spend in the pain economy.

As usual, Twain illuminates the pain economy primarily by example. Physical pain, though easily tradable, is not the only kind of currency accepted. Twain was intimate with physical pain—he suffered rheumatism in his writing hand, lay bed-ridden by illness for long stretches of time, and had more than his share of barked shins and saddle sores—yet he seemed to rate financial losses among his most painful experiences. A poor businessman and an inveterate speculator, Twain often found himself hurting for money. Financial struggle produced a domino effect of suffering in the author’s life. Extended lecturing tours kept the cash-strapped author

away from home and family, which took its toll both physically and emotionally. Following the bankruptcy of Twain's publishing house and his failed investment in the Paige typesetter machine, Livy Clemens and her husband came to believe that their public reputation hinged on their ability to repay their debts in full. It was for this reason that they were gone from home when Susy fell ill and died—an event that tendered them the greatest pain of their lives.

Not all of Twain's financial misery was self-inflicted, however. In the pain economy, this means a great deal. Twain had little patience for swindlers. He kept careful track of the people he felt had cheated him financially, and reserved for them a particularly uncomfortable corner of hell. A man of words, he used the page to exact a portion of his revenge—although he was not above attempting to settle the score in more practical ways, namely in court. As *The Gilded Age* and other works demonstrate, however, Twain was not solely concerned with his own financial pain. Businessmen and politicians who made personal gains through the financial hardship of others were lumped in with Twain's personal villains. Twain's diatribes against Rev. William Scott Ament, a missionary to China during the Boxer Rebellion, and Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science, for instance, center on their apparent willingness to profit financially at the expense of others, mostly those who are poor and already in pain.

Finally, psychological pain—shame, humiliation, and guilt—factors large in Twain's writing. Twain was particularly sensitive to the pain of embarrassment—so much so that avoidance of shame formed the basis of his concept of the human

psyche. From “Corn-Pone Opinions” to “What Is Man?” Twain preaches that failure to achieve external approval (and therefore self-approval) is unbearably painful. Twain gravitates to scenes of humiliation, both his own and others’, real and fictional. Sometimes these passages are attempted confessions, as when he relates his failure of courage in “The Private History of a Campaign That Failed.” Sometimes they are acts of vengeance on those he feels deserve punishment, as with the foolish, naked figure of Czar Nicholas before his mirror in “The Czar’s Soliloquy.” More often than not, however, there is something universal in the shame that Twain describes which compels readers to recall their own mistakes, and they must earn their laughter with a blush. Twain lures his readers into the pain economy with promises of enjoyment and entertainment, and he invites them to invest their pain by example.

Unsurprisingly, the pleasures and “rewards” of Twain’s pain economy can come in as many different forms as pain itself. For some, like the man who amputated his own leg in the story above, physical pain, primitive and bodily, transforms into physical pleasure (though usually not sexual pleasure in Twain’s texts) through the alchemy of self-satisfaction. Here, too, we find the self-sacrificing mother described by the Old Man of “What Is Man?” who willingly suffers for the sake of her child. “She takes a living *pleasure* in making these sacrifices,” the Old Man says. “*She does it for that reward*—that self-approval, that contentment, that peace, that comfort. *She would do it for your child* IF SHE COULD GET THE SAME PAY” (744). For others, money is the balm that soothes raw wounds, as it does for Huck

and Tom at the end of *Tom Sawyer* or any of the numerous unfortunates pitied and then elevated by Edward Tudor in the “Justice and Retribution” chapter of *The Prince and the Pauper*. And for still others—think of Merlin in “a delirium of silly laughter” as he sends Hank Morgan to his thousand-year sleep at the end of *Connecticut Yankee* (443)—pain’s payoff lies in the pleasure of a retaliatory blow.

But the pain economy extends beyond the characters in the text. Twain demands that we, his readers, be involved in the exchange. Through our amusement—one last and significant means of repaying pain—Twain demonstrates humor’s role in the pain-pleasure exchange. Freud reminds us that “the activity of joking cannot be said to have no aim or purpose, for it has set itself the unmistakable aim of arousing pleasure in the listener” (91). But pleasure cannot be had for free, and Twain will be sure to charge us for our laughter. No American reader, at least, can enjoy the joke of Ah Song Hi’s ironic suffering at the hands of employer, policeman, and legislator (ironic, given his optimistic belief in American freedom and democracy) without accepting the implicit condemnation of a passive American public (“Goldsmith’s Friend”). Many of the *Pudd’nhead Wilson’s New Calendar* maxims that head each chapter of *Following the Equator* function on a similar principle: if you laugh at the joke, you are the target of it. For instance, consider the opening maxim of Chapter XLVI: “If the desire to kill and the opportunity to kill came always together, who would escape hanging” (694). Only those who have, at some inconvenient time, harbored a murderous thought or two

can laugh at this joke, and it is only those who laugh whom Twain threatens with the gallows.

According to Freud, we are accustomed to putting “psychical energy” into appeasing the demands of our conscience and our inhibitions (manifest in feelings of guilt), but the “gain in pleasure” from joking redirects that energy away from those oppressive forces (114-115). The psyche reroutes the flow of attention, permitting the individual to gain some distance from the internal struggle over guilt. Humor “prevent[s] unpleasure from arising from internal sources”—it transforms and repurposes the energy of “unpleasure” into pleasure (Freud, 224). In other words, the tension created by our inhibitions fuels the joke itself. Twain kept himself supplied with inhibition by conscious effort. Shelley Fisher Fishkin reminds us that Twain actively sought advice from “censoring” women in his life (54). His humor was fueled by the demands placed on him as a respectable member of society. The part of Twain’s audience that lies closest to the center of social repression is privileged to laugh the hardest. When he breaks the tension of social inhibition, these readers feel the jolt release and laugh along. Take, for example, the culminating joke in “The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg.” Although there are some out of town reporters present (representatives of the larger social gaze), the majority of those present are Hadleyburgers, themselves pressed into false honesty from a young age, who know the Incorruptibles by sight and name. Their laughter in the moment of their town’s humiliation is thunderous. The raucous laughter at the town hall as the principal citizens fall, one after another, is a punishment for the

haughty and a reward for those who have long been pushed to the sidelines. Only those who cannot laugh—Mary and Edward Richards—continue to suffer.

Humor is one of Twain's primary tools for moving readers, characters, or the author himself from pain to payoff, or vice versa. Twain makes it easy to glean pleasure from his iniquity and his pain by inviting us to laugh at his stories. His debt in the pain economy—accrued, for instance, by his callous disappointment in the rescue of a Swiss child because he is thereby deprived of witnessing a Swiss funeral (*Tramp* 251)—is reduced exactly in proportion to how much joy we derive from laughing at him. Accepting pleasure, we become invested in the pain economy, regardless of how deserving the target of our laughter may be. We laugh at bloated monarchs, braggadocious dandies, and hysterical housewives alike. On the one hand, our laughter may punish one whose pleasures have gone too long unpaid-for with a dose of humiliation. On the other hand, Twain may provoke our laughter at an innocent victim in order to ensnare us in the joke, giving us a pleasure we did not earn and leaving us on the hook for the pain debt.

The Wilks brothers fraud in Chapter 25 of *Huckleberry Finn* provides one such laughter trap. As readers, we thoroughly enjoy the absurd posturing of the king and the duke as grieving brothers. Their ploy is transparent, and we rightly (and righteously) laugh at their shabby imitation of genuine human emotion: “they bent over and looked in the coffin, and took one sight, and then they bust out a crying so you could a heard them to Orleans, most” (*HF* 212). The problem for the reader comes when we begin to laugh not only at the self-serving criminals but at their

innocent victims as well. The king and the duke fool almost the entire town with their fraud. One particularly ostentatious performance of tender piety, Huck reports, “worked the crowd like you never see anything like it, and so everybody broke down and went to sobbing right out loud—the poor girls, too” (212). Huck denounces the whole scene as “disgusting,” and it seems clear that he includes the townspeople in his judgment. Yet they have not done anything to earn our shared disgust beyond being a bit too credulous and emotional.

When Dr. Robinson finally arrives as the sole clear-sighted citizen, the treachery of our laughter becomes apparent. His censure of the nieces—this disapproval is the humorless substance of our laughter—pushes them into the arms of their deceivers, along with a bag of money worth \$6,000 (*HF* 219). By the end of the scene, Robinson’s lack of pity for the innocent prevents his further intervention—“I wash *my* hands of the matter,” he resolves (219). By the end of the chapter, he has become the object of laughter of those he has mocked for their ignorance. The reader is left with no comfortable place to stand. Our amusement at the fraud’s success leaves us complicit either in the schemes of the king and the duke or the unsympathetic disapproval voiced by the doctor, perhaps both. Laughter tangles us together in a jumble of guilt, judgment, pain, and pleasure. Twain once said, “I have only amused people. Their laughter has submerged me” (Keller 51). But it submerges us, too.

The audience is expected to participate in the story, not critique it from afar. In good storytelling, writes Walter Benjamin the “chaste compactness which

precludes psychological analysis” allows listeners to integrate the story into their own memory and experience (91). Would-be critics take note. This text is designed to be participatory. We cannot expound upon it without revealing ourselves.

Twain’s fable about the animals that mistook their reflection for a painting aptly warns, “You can find in a text whatever you bring, if you will stand between it and the mirror of your imagination. You may not see your [ass’s] ears, but they will be there” (“A Fable” 879). It is often Twain’s intention that we wind up looking like asses, but he’s happy to leave some of the work up to us.

The closer we engage with Twain’s writing, the more likely it is that our pain accounts will be laid open for examination. It is Twain’s scene, and we play by his rules. Our laughter may deliver humiliation to the guilty, but at any moment, Twain might prove that we are just as guilty as those we ridicule—yet our pleasure remains, an outstanding debt. To settle up, we must enter the pain economy; we must play a part in Mark Twain’s scene.

Humor Studies

Pain, pleasure, humor, and morality are all bound up together for Twain. Despite Twain’s own late in life assertions, says Tom Quirk, he was first a humorist, then a moralist (*MTHN* 172-3). “Humor was his profession,” writes Quirk, “but it was also his medicine and it seemed to be good for what ailed him” (282). Twain ushers in either healing or injury, depending on which is required to restore the balance in the pain economy. Felicity Lunn argues that humor coats painful topics

like the proverbial spoonful of sugar; a text “can seduce us in the first instance with its evident humour, to then stop us in our tracks with more painful or uncomfortable themes that it uses humour to explore” (“Pathos” 28). Humor was Twain’s primary tool, and he wielded it with subtlety and skill.

Bruce Michelson advises us to beware of outdated humor theories when we read Twain. He argues that we too often avoid the fact “that a comic outbreak might have complex and dynamic relationships to the medium in which it appears, and also to a special historical moment” both in its own time and in the context of its successive readings (515). Taking this advisory to heart, I will borrow what light I can from nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sources to help elucidate Twain’s humor. With that said, I recognize that my mind has been formed in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; I simply cannot understand Twain’s works as they were first received. Moreover, I intend this study to be relevant to *our* time, and so I will not shy away from readings and criticisms that would, undoubtedly, baffle Twain and his contemporary readers.

Freud serves both of these aims. Because his work springs from nineteenth- and twentieth-century understandings of the human mind, Sigmund Freud’s work, especially *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, speaks to Twain’s writings. James Cox argues that Freud’s thought is a kind of culmination of nineteenth century culture, and his connection to Twain is quite credible (vi). Because Freud’s ideas continue to influence how we think about human psychology (even as a point of

opposition, as he falls in and out of favor with psychologists and literary scholars), his work remains relevant to contemporary audiences.

Given their deep psychological roots, pain, pleasure, and humor are obvious topics for Freud, particularly in relation to each other. W. R. Irwin maintains that Twain and Freud are partners in the revelation of the important truth that “the price of pleasure is pain” (30). Twain may not have read Freud or used his language to talk about psychological ideas, writes Irwin, but he seems to have had an implicit understanding of the conscience, or superego, as a force that “dwells on violations of our ideals and promotes feelings of guilt” (36). According to Irwin, Twain completes the work that Freud begins when he describes “the causative factors in the forming of civilization and the personal discontents inevitably generated”; Twain brings those factors into practice and leads the reader to make moral valuations of the actions taken or not taken in response to “civilized” forces (46). Though approaching the topic from different angles, both Freud and Twain concern themselves with the cost of societal pressures on the individual. For Freud, humor is simply one more expression of the unconscious, helping to reveal the problems the psyche tries to mask. For Twain, humor not only reveals but transforms the problem, allowing people to pay off their guilt by making others laugh or, by finding humor in their own humiliations, to reap pleasure from their pain.

Like Twain, Freud is concerned with the “economy” contained in joking. As I describe it, Twain’s pain economy can transform an otherwise painful experience into a pleasurable one by means of humor. Freud argues that the pleasure of joking

itself springs from the conservation of “psychical energy,” reducing the energy we must spend on “inhibition,” “ideation,” and “feeling” (Carey xxvii). When we watch another person working too hard, physically, or oversimplifying, mentally, says Freud, we go through the mental or physical process with them, then laugh in relief when the imbalance of energy builds up to a breaking point (188). Freud and Twain both give a great deal of weight to any discrepancy in the internal economy—and for both, laughter is a response that seeks to return the individual to a balance.

Freud is by no means the be all and end all of humor studies. I will also be referencing the work of French philosopher Henri Bergson’s 1900 piece, “Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic.” Bergson ardently resists the idea that human beings are machines, bound to an inevitable future, but he suggests that the appearance of a mechanical person provokes laughter. Twain, of course, not only laughed at the appearance of man-as-machine, he believed it to be our actual state of being. We are assembled from a random assortment of component parts and invariably behave according to our design. From the individual to entire civilizations, Twain says, humans are caught in unchanging, mechanical cycles. Although Bergson did not believe in the mechanical nature of reality, he understood it as humorous. We laugh at pratfalls, for example, because of the seemingly mechanical failure to adapt: “a kind of physical obstinacy, *as a result, in fact, of rigidity or of momentum*” (Bergson 5). For Bergson, however, laughter at the mechanical is a corrective force (10). Humor teaches people how to behave properly so they don’t incur the laughter of their neighbors. Twain, too, believed that laughter was a powerful social force—

“Against the assault of laughter nothing can stand” (*Mysterious* 166)—but people would never stop being machines. If anything, a fear of ridicule was just one more rigid element in the mechanism of the human psyche.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, plenty of philosophers and scholars have devoted themselves to humor studies. A few of these works will make appearances in this dissertation, specifically as they approach the intersections of pain, humor, and morality. In the past few decades, John Morreall has done extensive work in describing the history of humor in Western culture. His view of humor as providing a “conceptual shift,” or a sudden and pleasant “change of psychological state” (“New Theory” 248), helps to explain how humor transforms pain into pleasure. “The best humor gets us to see familiar things in unfamiliar ways,” writes Morreall, “and so does the best philosophy. . . . The humorous attitude is a disengaged, distanced attitude, one in which we look at the world from at least one step back” (“New Theory” 257-58). Morreall ultimately claims that humor is well suited to the Zen Buddhist goal of non-attachment (260), and thus discloses his particular objective for humor’s work. I will return to this idea in the final chapter.

Before leaving humor studies, I want to acknowledge Bruce Michelson’s very helpful “perception” that the expectations surrounding “literature” intensify and modify reading of humor (517). How do I “intensify and modify” Twain’s humor with my reading? I believe I have found a pain economy in Twain’s writings that enters the pain-pleasure exchange through laughter, shame, and retribution. Twain’s writings are invigorated by the dynamic force of pain and pleasure seeking

a balance. A persistent discrepancy in the pain accounts, for Twain, is a moral issue, and he uses the pain economy to evaluate all supposedly “moral” authorities, including God himself. I believe that there is much to be discovered by exploring the consequences of such a theory. I hope that Twain’s humor *does* challenge my analysis (as Michelson promises it will), leaving the door open for others who are eager to enter the discussion.

Conclusion

When studying Twain, the presence of contradiction can be expected, regardless of theoretical filter or scope. Following William James’ injunction to “place yourself at the centre of a man’s philosophic vision” to reach a full understanding of his thought, Stanley Brodwin finds a “radical sense of contradiction” at Twain’s core (220-21). Twain likes to play the devil’s advocate, even with himself. Twain felt no obligation to consistency; in fact, quite the opposite was true. “Who is the *really* consistent man?” asks Twain. “The man who changes. Since change is the law of his *being*, he cannot *be* consistent if he stick in a rut” (“Consistency” 909). Twain put immense stock in independent thought (even when he half-doubted it was possible), but he also valued social capital and financial reward. His writing often bears the marks of capitulation to whatever audience he was selling to in the moment: sometimes the dignified cosmopolitan, sometimes the rugged individual. Twain actively resists consistent analysis.

I suggest that Mark Twain wrote scenes of pain for his own pleasure, for the pleasure of his audience, and for the reward or punishment of the characters in a moral world of his own creation. I will endeavor to show the ways that the commodification of pain drives Twain's writing, but I recognize that the idea of the pain economy is mine, not Twain's. I use the pain economy as a lens through which to read Twain, a tool to examine and to reveal new aspects of these marvelously complex texts. My own terminology surrounding the "pain economy" implies the exact measurement of pain and pleasure. That, in itself is somewhat problematic, because these ideas are subjective and experiential. But I do not expect that I will present an invariable metric for pain debt and pleasure repayment by the end of my study. Any attempt at such an equation would inevitably break down, because Twain was writing about life as he knew it, and that life was hopelessly inconsistent. Instead, I am looking at broad trends—the way that Twain's writing embodies the pain-pleasure exchange and how his moral judgments are tied to balance and imbalance in that exchange.

The equation is not always perfect, however. At times, Twain's system of measuring pain does not square with the real pain being suffered by the people he is writing about. This is especially clear when Twain deals with slavery and racial injustice. Twain demonstrates a limited sympathy and profound (sometimes willful) ignorance with regards to certain people—Native Americans, African Americans, Irish Catholics, and several indigenous groups around the world. Perhaps Twain is genuinely unconscious of the pain caused by his grotesque characterizations of the

non-white Other, or perhaps his participation in the crime puts him too close to the pain to be able to deal with it objectively. Either way, it is clear that Twain's implementation of the pain economy is flawed, even inherently imbalanced. That said, my purpose is not to correct Twain's moral position but to reveal the mechanism of the pain economy in his work. Whether he deals with pain with complete fairness or not, it is significant that he never disengages from it.

This study begins by looking at humor in pain as it appeared throughout Twain's life and writing career. In Chapter One, "Pain and Intimacy," I will explore Twain's intimate relationship to pain throughout his life. His deep interest in pain, combined with his ability to transform pain into pleasure takes on a nearly masochistic air. Masochism is, admittedly, a loaded term, but it proves to be an enlightening concept within this study of the pain economy. In Chapter Two, "Guilt and Innocence," I show how Twain imitated and redefined the role of Victorian writer/moralist. The pain economy proposes a new morality that sometimes adheres to traditional moral codes and sometimes flouts them. To complicate matters further, Twain struggled with his own sense of guilt and sought to punish himself through his writing, even as he laid traps for those who had overdrawn their pleasure in the pain economy. Chapter Three, "The Heroes," looks at those few individuals who Twain saw as the heroes of his moral system. They are the eternal creditors in the pain economy, amassing a wealth of personal suffering while only giving pleasure to others. Twain honored his heroes—among them, Joan of Arc, Ulysses S. Grant, Helen Keller, and Livy Clemens—with blind devotion. On the

opposite side of the spectrum are the villains, appearing (appropriately enough) in Chapter Four, "The Villains." Twain condemns anyone who benefits from the suffering of others, and he attacks them wholeheartedly in print. Capitalists, kings, and religious leaders all fall under the author's censure. Twain's final reckoning, however, is with God—and himself. In Chapter Five, "The Authors," I will show how Twain approaches God's "writing" of creation and human nature as a rival author. Placing himself on par with God, Twain opens himself up to his own brand of criticism when he enforces the pain economy as yet another rigid moral system.

CHAPTER ONE: Pain and Intimacy

The public interest in suffering has not diminished much since Twain's days. The market for pain does not suffer the booms and busts of Wall Street. Graphically violent video games, macabre newscasts, angsty vampire novels—these dark pleasures are merely the current expression of an age-old marketable pain. To sell a product, one must know it well. And so it was for Mark Twain. The author had an intimate connection to pain, strengthened by his inclination to punish himself for past sins and the circumstances of his life that kept him supplied with the raw material of his pain economy. From his earliest writings until the last, Twain's stories of suffering and pain engaged his readers. Twain understood that even images of another's pain have the power to compel involvement; rather than achieving an impersonal distance from pain or even reveling in *schadenfreude*, we become entangled in stories of suffering because we translate them into the more familiar language of our own experience.

Depictions of suffering, although theoretically remote, become ours the moment we are exposed to them. Writing about the atrocities in the Philippines, Twain notes that, upon reading an account of Filipino children being massacred, the reader imagines not alien children but recognizable ones—children the reader knows and loves (A1 405). Introduced into the reader's personal story, the image becomes more powerful, more compelling . . . and more uncomfortable. Although

pain is reliable bait for human attention, some kind of reward is necessary to set the hook. Mark Twain became a skilled fisherman, in this sense, offering both the graphic allure of engaging pain and the payoff for investing in it.

Given the magnitude of human pain, fear, humiliation, poverty, and powerlessness that Twain addresses in his writing, laughter hardly seems the logical response. But Twain's laughter does not negate the pain or deny its origin; it transforms it. "Twain's genius," exclaims Joe Fulton, "is that he turns the 'dark and terrifying' elements of reality into 'ludicrous monstrosities'"² (54). Twain's ability to transform the frightening into the ridiculous is especially "liberating," says Fulton, for readers troubled by traditional ontologies in which a capricious, intractable deity wields total power over the fate of humanity. "In Twain's world, fear becomes laughter; Providence explains the everyday 'roughing' that people experience, and Twain's grotesque parody of those providential explanations helps us to laugh at a joke that sometimes seems to be at our expense" (Fulton 54). Twain points in accusation and mockery towards the hand of Providence; whatever suffering is dispensed, Twain accepts it, amplifies it, and commodifies it, thus regaining a modicum of control in a world that is racked with unavoidable pain.

By wresting pain from the hand of his tormentor and transforming it into laughter and other forms of pleasure, Twain takes on the role of the masochist. In the practice of masochism, writes Gilles Deleuze, "It is the victim who speaks through the mouth of his torturer, without sparing himself" (22). Twain's tendency

² Fulton borrows the phrase, "ludicrous monstrosities," from Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*.

towards masochism is fundamental to our understanding of the pain economy. For himself *and* his readers, Twain creates a framework for making meaning and gaining pleasure—or some other kind of payoff—from the experience of pain. Twain can paradoxically distance himself from pain by dealing intimately with it and investing it with high value. Twain invites his readers to practice the masochistic transformation of the pain economy as a means to profit from their suffering—past, present, and future.

The term ‘masochism’—especially in the breathless aftermath of best-selling books like *Fifty Shades of Grey*—conjures images of leather whips and handcuffs. The sexual practices associated with sadomasochism,³ however, are only a small part of SM practice and not particularly relevant here. Although Mark Twain baring his bottom for a whipping is an appealingly absurd image, I do not see Twain’s masochism in connection to sexuality. Masochism as an enacted moral reckoning and a process of meaning making is more to the point. Mark Twain’s pain economy resembles masochism in this latter sense. Treating himself as a laboratory for pain, pleasure, sin and redemption, Twain acquaints himself with pain in an intimate way. Twain works the principles of the pain economy into every part of his life. By his own account, he discovered the rule of pain and recompense at the tender age of nine days old, when he

³ Freud, although useful to me in discussions of Victorian humor, is far too wedded to sadomasochism as a unified concept—and a sexual one—to be really helpful here. Since the use of the term masochism is my own, not Twain’s, I will elaborate on my argument using more modern understandings than Freud or Krafft-Ebing, even though these men were Twain’s contemporaries.

noticed that if a pin was sticking in me and I advertised it in the usual fashion, I was lovingly petted and coddled and pitied in a most agreeable way and got a ration between meals.

It was human nature to want to get these riches, and I fell. I lied about the pin—advertising one when there wasn't any. ("My First Lie" 439)

Eventually Mark Twain learned to work this system professionally, sometimes selling a counterfeit pain, sometimes offering authentic tales of his own suffering. He discovered that people would pay actual money for his accounts of pain, embarrassment, or loss.

Without this remuneration, the author would have no reason to dwell in such unflattering detail, for instance, on his foolhardy purchase of a "Genuine Mexican Plug" from an oily horse salesman (*Roughing It* 178-84). The author/narrator's suffering in this story is multifaceted and abundant. Within the text, the narrator suffers everything from a mild jealousy for the straight-backed horsemen of the American West to the loss of his dignity (and twenty-seven dollars) in falling for the salesman's pitch of the "Genuine Mexican Plug" to actual physical injury during his first bone-rattling attempt to mount the horse. "Imagination cannot conceive how disjointed I was—how internally, externally and universally I was unsettled, mixed up and ruptured," writes Twain (181). A "sympathetic crowd" gathers around the young man, but their words of consolation fall short of true comfort: "Stranger, you've been taken in. Everybody in this camp knows that horse. . . . Why, you turnip, if you had laid low and kept dark, there's chances to buy an *American* horse for mighty little more than you paid for that bloody old foreign relic" (181-82). The

narrator finds himself stuck with the unruly beast, unable even to give it away, except to a stranger.

The embarrassment of this episode touches Twain the author as well as his narrator. By claiming association with this naïve young version of himself, Twain takes on the young man's shame as well. Twain is conscious of the judgment of his audience, and he constructs a fairly questionable disclaimer to defend himself.

"[W]hoever has had the luck to ride a real Mexican plug will recognize the animal depicted in this chapter," concludes Twain, "and hardly consider him exaggerated—but the uninitiated will feel justified in regarding his portrait as a fancy sketch, perhaps" (*Roughing It* 184). His defense need not be robust, however, because whether the reader laughs at his foolishness or not, whether they believe his pain as authentic or not, they have purchased his book. Twain has made an exchange with his reader—his pain for their amusement—and everyone comes out the richer for it.

The pain-pleasure exchange does not always enrich, however. There is another side to it. In "A Mysterious Visit," the Twainian narrator learns that puffing up one's social accomplishments and earthly rewards (at least in front of the taxman) comes with a hefty price tag. In this sketch, the narrator, unfamiliar with the work done by the agents of the "Internal Revenue Department," attempts to lure his visitor into confessing his business "with a deep, deep ruse"—i.e., the author will brag about his own business until the other man cannot help but talk about his. Through the course of the visit, the narrator reports an exaggerated income to the taxman and is left with a bill for \$10,650 ("Mysterious Visit" 343). The author does

get out of his bill, but only by cheating on his taxes, which bears its own consequences. "I stood up and swore to lie after lie, fraud after fraud, villainy after villainy, till my immortal soul was coated inches and inches thick with perjury and my self-respect was gone forever and ever" (344). There is no pleasure without a price.

For Twain, the masochistic exchange of pleasure and pain, though amplified in his writing, is a basic law of human existence. Lyn Cowan, a Jungian analyst, describes masochism as a function of the soul and a tool for constructing reality:

Masochism is essential, less for sexual pleasure than for the very life of the soul. . . . Masochism, before it is anything else, is essential reality. It is not a mere perversion, not a distortion or deviation, but essence: a reflection of the soul in its tortured, most inarticulate moments. These are moments of exquisite pain, imminent death, intolerable images, of unbearable passion that ignites both body and soul. (xi)

The pain-ridden world does not dissolve in the dream of the masochism. In fact, masochism faces the unpleasant elements of life straight on, without flinching or drifting off into the nonsensical idylls of sleep. The masochist understands that human beings *will suffer* and so preemptively welcomes pain and finds the means to process it into something worthwhile and beneficial. In the SM scene, this means attaining the blissful "subspace" that resembles Csíkszentmihályi's "flow": a transcendent experience of deep concentration and heightened consciousness (Newmahr 96). In Twain's pain economy, the payoff is usually more quantifiable: sometimes it is laughter, sometimes monetary recompense, sometimes revenge, sometimes glory. Twain's interest in pain is less a sign of depression than of

commercial acumen. The author is making use of what he knows is life's most readily available resource and seeking a means of capitalizing on it.

If Twain is going to build up credit in the pain economy, the pain has to actually *hurt*. Deleuze writes, "It is argued, justifiably, that the masochist is not a strange being who finds pleasure in pain, but that he is like everyone else, and finds pleasure where others do, the simple difference being that for him pain, punishment or humiliation are necessary prerequisites to obtaining gratification" (71). And perhaps he is right. Perhaps the pain is not itself the pleasure, but a means to an end. Cowan adds that masochism—the close engagement with pain—creates in its participants "the humus of psychic earth, for the very health and vitality of the soul" (41). Without decay and breakdown, there is no growth.

For most people, pain requires a transformation before pleasure is possible. The same shift in perception occurs in humor. Morreall identifies two basic components of "laughter situations": a sudden "change of psychological state" and the provision "that the psychological shift is felt as pleasant" ("New Theory" 248). Twain's humor often begins somewhere unpleasant, even for his reader. Those who have suffered at the hands of a snake oil salesman, those who have been caught out in a brag, those who have endured endless hours of god-awful poetry—it is these who are privileged to laugh at Twain's jokes about swindlers and self-proclaimed wordsmiths. "Humor, at its best," writes Neil Schmitz, "forgives and resolves a grievous wrong. It admits it, full measure, receives it, and expresses the immediate experience in humorous language. With verbal dexterity, in some comical voice, it

economizes pain's impact" (74). That Mark Twain tracked his own saddle sores and embarrassments with an accountant's precision is not to say that Twain enjoyed his suffering as it was happening. But he knew that real pain was a reliable currency with which he could purchase pleasure. For humor and masochism—and in the pain economy—if one does not begin in a place of real pain, one cannot reach real pleasure.

Masochism often deals not only in physical pain but in psychological pain—shame, guilt, and humiliation.⁴ Twain writes with a nearly Freudian awareness of the power of guilt and shame to motivate human behavior. Tom Quirk notes, for instance, that one of the most powerful scenes in *Huckleberry Finn*, when Jim chastises Huck for tricking him into believing his night of sorrow over the lost Huck was a dream, is motivated by shame-avoidance (*MTHN* 127-28). For the sake of survival alone, it would behoove Jim to put up with any and all of Huck's antics, Quirk argues, but the pain of his humiliation at Huck's hands proved, in that moment, greater than the fear of slavery. Huck, whom Twain believed to be "an exceedingly good-hearted boy" (qtd. in "Morality" 6), accepts his debt to Jim and does not punish him for lashing out in anger.

Guilt is rich in pain. "Often the deepest suffering comes not from bearing punishment," explains Cowan, "but from bearing *gnosis*, a constant burdensome

⁴ Cowan distinguishes between shame and guilt. Guilt indicates that a law has been broken by an act of the ego; it is a violation that can and should invoke appropriate retribution. Shame, however, is a state of being, a quality of the soul, unchangeable by ego (80-82). I use do not always preserve Cowan's careful distinction, believing that these concepts bleed into each other, especially as the author takes on the roles of both punisher and punished, both making the rules and breaking them.

knowledge of one's own truths and one's capacity for all manner of evil and destruction" (25). That knowledge is itself painful, but it also justifies the suffering position assumed by the masochist. The masochist is paradoxically empowered by his or her submission. Given that the guilty ostensibly deserve punishment, the pain can be theirs and theirs alone. The masochistic transformation of pain is a means of dealing with inevitable guilt. From the sufferer's position, a person can "choose from sometimes competing discourses to contextualize, recast, make sense of, and enjoy the pain, anguish, or subservience of bottoming" (Newmahr 89). The empowered masochist makes it more difficult for an outside force to inflict lasting harm through condemnation and punishment. Thus, Twain turns his "punishment" into pain capital which he can spend as he chooses.

Like the pain economy, masochism offers participants "investment pain: pain payoffs" through an extreme "no pain, no gain" philosophy: "Pain is understood not merely as an unfortunate byproduct, but as a means to a particular end" (Newmahr 138). As Twain lessens his pain investment, the value of his writing decreases. Forrest Robinson argues that *A Tramp Abroad*—a book which Twain himself greatly disliked—is Twain's least interesting travel book because, in part, "the traveler disburdened of inflated expectations is no longer prey to painful disenchantment" which so electrifies *Roughing It* and *Innocents Abroad* ("Innocent" 42). It is pertinent to note that *A Tramp Abroad* is also significantly less funny than Twain's other travel books.

So Twain actively maintains in himself, whether consciously or not, a requisite level of pain at all times. Even as he strives to find a source of moral failing outside of himself—in a God who has invented a conscience-riddled but morally weak human creature, for instance—Twain cannot shake his sense of guilt for his own sins (Quirk, *MTHN* 243). Not even repentance brings relief, because it involves self-reflection, which leads to self-knowledge, which is quite damning. Twain relentlessly turns our eyes to the human propensity for evil and destruction, and so maneuvers his readers, as humans, into a state of culpability with him. But if he did not do this, we would be paupers in the pain economy.

When I claim that Twain demonstrates a masochistic relationship to pain, I put him in the company of people who have an intimacy with pain, who experience the transformation of suffering into pleasure, release, or some kind of transcendence. Twain was unable to endure his life's pain by sheer force of will. By making his pain an exchange currency, he was able to have control over his pain and release of control at the same time. "Strength can be a terrible burden," writes Cowan. "It is a bondage which must be relieved in moments of abandonment, of weakness, of letting down and letting go" (111). The pressure to succeed can be crushing, but masochism allows its participants to find value in the breakdown. Twain's humor regularly upends perceived success; braggarts, tyrants, and "good little boys" do not fare well. Kant, says Morreall, thought that humor's pleasure came only through "healthful effect that laughter has on our bodies," but that "it cannot be

gratifying to have our expectations proved delusive and our desire to understand frustrated" ("Rejection" 251).

Twain, of course, proves the opposite. In "How to Cure a Cold" (1863), the narrator tries out every hair-brained cold remedy offered him by his friends, each causing more pain than the last in their haphazard application. His article, he claims, will help to inform his readers in the best way to cure a cold. "It is a good thing, perhaps, to write for the amusement of the public," reflects Twain, "but it is a far higher and nobler thing to write for their instruction—their profit—their actual and tangible benefit" (37). But, of course, amusement is the only "profit" to be derived from the sketch. As with the "wake-up Jake" incident at Steamboat Springs, Twain's physical suffering turns to pleasure not by the healing of his pain but by using it as an exchange currency. Through his masochistic engagement with pain, Twain discovers that the path to pleasure lies through disappointment, confusion, and shame. If we seek enjoyment from Twain's texts, it will be on these exact terms.

Twain's Intimacy with Pain

Twain never had to look far to find his pain capital. Growing up in an adherent Presbyterian family, Twain would have initially seen pain in association with sin. Pain was God's punishment for sin, or, if undeserved, might elicit God's mercy. But it was usually deserved. Twain had always been a skilled and creative sinner, and so he simultaneously became accustomed to his burden of guilt, redeemable only through God's grace. As he learned to extract a payoff from his pain

without God's intervention, his sins grew less overwhelming to him but not less important.

Lies were Twain's first and most prized sins. Twain uses his lying to maneuver the reader from judgment of the sin to complicity in it. As mentioned above, Twain "remembers" that, as a baby, he so liked getting "petted and coddled and pitied" whenever he was stuck with a diaper pin that he began to "lie" about his pain to claim the reward, diaper pin or no ("My First Lie" 439). Twain chides his baby character with a certain degree of indulgence, pointing out that lying to benefit oneself is a universal fault and hardly unique to him. He would not soon shed his identity as lovable rascal. Twain's *Autobiography* describes how Jane Lampton Clemens, the author's mother, became adept at sorting her son's "embroidery" from the truth—it was a kind of game between them (A1 268). Twain claimed that she liked his naughtiness, especially in contrast to his insufferably good little brother, Henry. In the face of "the unbroken monotony" of Henry's righteousness, Sammy Clemens's "trouble" was actually a relief to his mother (350). In the older boy, she had a playmate in the cat-and-mouse game of disobedience and punishment. One of the attractions in the pain economy is that it is dynamic, full of potential energy. Whenever possible, the boy would benefit from his lies, knowing that it was only a matter of time before he was found out and charged for his pleasures. Unlike the divine system of pain and punishment, this economy could be played to win. Twain brags,

I am sure I know more about lying than anybody who has lived on this planet before me. I believe I am the only person alive who is sane

upon this subject. I have been familiar with it for seventy years. The first utterance I ever made was a lie. . . . I have been interested in this great art ever since. I have practiced it ever since; sometimes for pleasure, usually for profit. And to this day I do not always know when to believe myself, and when to take the matter under consideration. (A1 425)

Although he plays the matter off as a joke, it is a confession, too. Twain may treat lying as an innocuous, even beneficial, habit, but it loses its power if there is no inhibition around it. The pleasure of the joke gains its energy from the inhibition around calling oneself a liar. “Humor can provide information about oneself that one would rather *not* have,” writes Simon Critchley (*On Humour* 74). The author admits that he lies for pleasure and profit, that he has done so from the cradle. And, of course, he slyly implicates his readers for paying him to do so. If we were not eager to read his lies, there would be no profit in it. He will capitalize on our interest. The humorist may lie about reality to garner a laugh from his audience, but the lie—offering an unexpected alternative—forces them to reconsider the “truth.”

Twain was not immune to the power of his mother’s Presbyterian morality. Twain’s joking admission of his religious guilt seems to imply what Critchley calls “an indirect appeal that this place stands in need of change” (*On Humour* 75). In his childhood recollections, Twain laughs nervously about the specter of divine punishment. Despite his practical faith in the pain economy, Twain cannot shake the idea that his sins will be rebuked by God through suffering. The young Sammy Clemens was keeping track of the moral debt he was racking up with his lies and general waywardness, so when a sky-rending thunderstorm struck, it seemed that

these events “were inventions of Providence to beguile me to a better life” (41 159). After all, he had given matches to a tramp who then burned to death in the jail; he had stood complacent with the crowd watching men die from gunshot and knife wounds; in fact, he seemed to be present when all of the local tragedies occurred (157-58). Naturally, God was trying to correct the boy’s erring ways. Looking back, the author scoffs not so much at the idea that he deserved punishment but his vanity in thinking he had God’s notice: “It would not have surprised me, nor even overflattered me if Providence had killed off that whole community in trying to save an asset like me” (159). A second thunderstorm appears in Hannibal on the night that the original “Injun Joe” died. Twain remembers that there was only one conclusion that could be drawn: “Satan had come to get Injun Joe. I had no shadow of doubt about it” (398). The boy immediately thinks of his own sins and repents heartily, but the calm of morning removes the urgency of reform, and he goes back to his usual pursuits. In Twain’s memory, he internalized the external world-as-God; the result was tumultuous, if temporary, suffering. In Twain’s experience, communication between the individual and the universe is fraught with a petrifying, painful intensity. Although the morning clears up the immediate need to address God’s unnerving focus on the sinful boy, the tension with God is not resolved in the space of these recollections. It provides no comfortable resting place for the author.

Kenneth Andrews argues that Twain’s oversensitive nature left him with a distorted and “unique” sense of his own guilt and suffering (75). Even as a child, Twain was aware of his failings and the price he paid for them, sometimes to the

point of narcissism. Reminiscing on his childhood, Twain reports that his two beatings were the only time his father ever punished anyone in the family: “once for telling him a lie—which surprised me, and showed me how unsuspecting he was, for that was not my maiden effort” (*FE* 642). There is no question that Twain was guilty. He lied incessantly; he would never equivocate on this point. But let us not overlook that Twain believes he was the *only one* ever punished, of all his siblings. Twain believed wholeheartedly in his uniquely sinful state. It was, in fact, important to him to be guilty, to be worthy of his pain. The pain economy was, therefore, a necessity. How else could he manage his repayment?

Twain giddily anticipates the impending payback for his violations, and he surrenders himself to the pain economy through his writing. When Twain’s readers laugh at his past sins, they simultaneously condemn and exonerate him. On the one hand, their laughter is an implicit acknowledgment that the misbehavior is out of place and worthy of derision. Twain’s exaggerated confession of his ineptitude as a government clerk in “The Facts Concerning the Recent Resignation” (1867) may take a jab at the larger problem of inefficient government, but it does so by enumerating the narrator’s shameful vanities. On the other hand, the audience proves itself willing to accept the benefit of amusement as recompense for the narrator’s sins. And it is good they do, because more often than not, the audience itself is implicated in those same sins.

Laughter complicates dichotomous moral choices by foisting self-criticism upon the laughing community. Twain’s 1880 speech to the Hartford Monday

Evening Club, "On the Decay of the Art of Lying," depends entirely on the audience being torn between wanting to condemn lying as a sin and letting Twain finagle them into admitting, first, that they themselves lie habitually and, second, that their truths are not necessarily virtuous. "An injurious truth has no merit over an injurious lie," Twain scolds his listeners. "Neither should ever be uttered. The man who speaks an injurious truth lest his soul be not saved if he do otherwise, should reflect that that sort of a soul is not strictly worth saving" (826).

The salability of pain becomes more difficult the closer it draws to death. And it does almost seem as if death stands as the grim alternative to laughter. If the pain is not diffused, if the disease is not dispelled, death will be the strikingly unfunny punchline. Yet Twain did not shy away from the figure of death. Instead, he allows it to remain, adding a seriousness to his gambling with pain. "Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell," writes Benjamin. "He has borrowed his authority from death" (94). The body is the Achilles heel of the soul, leaving earthly life perpetually vulnerable to abrupt end. Death's inevitability can turn life into a waiting game of suspense.

Death was an ever-present feature of Twain's childhood. He spent the first seven years of his life, Twain reports, "a sickly and precarious and tiresome and uncertain child"; his mother worried over him with homeopathic remedies, but nothing seemed to be working (41 215). Many years later, Twain asked his mother about it:

"I suppose that during all that time you were uneasy about me?"
 "Yes, the whole time."

“Afraid I wouldn’t live?”

After a reflective pause—ostensibly to think out the facts—

“No—afraid you would.” (215-216)

When a measles epidemic swept Hannibal during Twain’s boyhood, he felt the agony of death’s anticipation for himself. “I cannot remember now whether I was frightened about the measles or not, but I clearly remember that I grew very tired of the suspense I suffered on account of being continually under the threat of death” (41 420). Getting the disease and having it over with was a means of forcing death’s hand. So Sammy climbs into bed with a sick friend, contracts the disease, loses interest in life, and lives anyway (420-21). Twain does mention that he mustered “the vaguest interest” in the circle of crying relatives “merely because I was the centre of all this emotional attention and was gratified by it and vain of it” (421), but his overwhelming memory is that of indifference. Death erases the value of all things. It threatens to break down the pain economy. In the face of annihilation, pain, pleasure, justice, and sin all cease to matter.

Years later, in “The Turning Point of My Life,” Twain pinpoints his measles story as the decisive moment when he began down the path towards his literary career.⁵ He found death valueless, dull, and inert as literary fuel. Life—painful and suspenseful as it was—was the only interesting story, and he was drawn to it.

Twain’s interface with the pain economy became the source for his writing. In his

⁵ The explanatory notes to the *Autobiography* (Vol. 1) version of this story point out that Twain was imprecise regarding the timing of the measles epidemic. In his autobiographical dictations, he recalls that it occurred in 1845, when he was ten. “The Turning Point in My Life” has him at twelve, so that he can launch into the printer’s trade as a result. Historical records point to 1844 as the likely date.

near-death experience, he discovered that mortality could not be defeated without also surrendering his supply of creative energy: pain.

Twain's attachment to pain can be uncomfortable to his readers, even if it doesn't surprise us anymore. Naturally, Twain, the great transcriptionist of "vernacular" human nature (Quirk, HNB 22), is bound to process the full range of human experience, not just the harmless pleasantries. For Twain, the human experience is inextricable from the interplay of pain and pleasure. And yet, the full extent of his investment in pain is sometimes difficult to stomach. "Perhaps Mark Twain, the Wild Man of the Washoe, did die in despair, no jest on his lips," writes Keough, all but apologizing for the failure of a man he has chosen as an example of American comedy. "But how many men die *well*? It is important to recall the rich life Twain enjoyed and his contribution to American—and world—literature" (60). It is misleading to separate the old Twain from the young so completely. Of course Twain's work changes throughout his long career, but there is no jarring dissonance between the young Twain with the old. Twain's later writings *are* focused on pain and suffering, but so were his earlier ones. A truly jarring, disjointed image is that of a peaceful, imperturbable Twain, drifting into his waning years on a tide of unmitigated pleasure. Andrews calls Twain's growing cynicism a "malady" that was "centered in an unbalanced and immature response to experience" (126). Twain's constant return to pain, however, is neither the cynicism of old nor some manner of adolescent angst. Instead, as evidence mounts that the world is governed by

suffering and that failure is inevitable, Twain finds the means to turn that pain into creative energy. To do otherwise is creative suicide.

In *Dangerous Intimacy*, Karen Lystra gives an account of the years following Livy's death in which Twain attempted to achieve a kind of pain-free existence. The author had declared his retirement and meant to enjoy it. He evaded pain—refusing to read his epileptic daughter's pleading letters, turning a blind eye to his misuse by Lyon and Ashcroft, neglecting his historically troublesome business concerns almost entirely. Instead, he surrounded himself with pleasures—playing billiards at every possible moment and 'collecting' adolescent girls, his Angel Fish, for his amusement. His writing nearly ground to a halt. The Ashcroft-Lyon manuscript, delving into the humiliating abuse he suffered at the hands of his assistants, signals his full reentry into a world of pain. Among other works, "Letters from the Earth" emerged from this time of reengagement. This work contains some of the most anguished rants against human suffering that Twain ever composed. He may have enjoyed his foray into peaceful retirement, but he couldn't stay there. His investment in pain had been too extensive by that point, the creative payoff too great, to permit total liquidation.

As I will discuss in Chapter Three, Twain idealized the ability to suffer without the need for payoff, but so tranquil a mental state was beyond him. He sometimes felt embarrassed of his need for pain transformation. Suffering, Twain believed, caused "periodical and sudden changes in me, from deep melancholy to half insane tempests and cyclones of humor" (A1 362). Twain gives an example of one such incident. When Emma Nye lay dying in his home, he experienced "one of

these spasms of humorous possession” and created his absurd and very funny “Map of Paris.” Twain sees a direct correlation between the stress of caring for a dying friend and the creation of his antic piece. Unable to keep any kind of wealth on hand for long, Twain “spasmed” with humor in an attempt to return the scales to zero. His sorrow enabled, even necessitated his humor. Try as he might, he could not separate the two.

And he did try. “It is altogether telling,” says Robinson, “that Twain viewed his emotional levitations as an embarrassment, a constitutional perversity for which he took no responsibility, and whose evanescence he surely recognized” (“Dreaming” 450). In his 1907 speech for the Society of the Pilgrims Luncheon in London, Twain appeals for permission to own his pain without the compulsion to turn it to laughter for his audience. “And so, as I say, I cannot always be cheerful, and I cannot always be chaffing; I must sometimes lay the cap and bells aside, and recognize that I am of the human race like the rest, and must have my cares and griefs” (“Our Guest” 817). But who was forcing him to spend his pain in the first place? Twain proves himself the inveterate spendthrift. He was addicted to the performance, the meaning-making, the payoff of masochistic pain transformation. Tom Quirk implies that Twain’s curious, often humorous contemplation of human nature in spite of his “hellish” final years was a kind of medicine for the soul (*MTHN* 240-41). I believe that his humor is a proactive response to the “hellish” years, a means of organizing a surplus pain. Ultimately, Twain knew he had no choice. In “What Is Man?” the Old Man’s words explain the author’s indomitable humor as an intrinsic quality. “If a

man is born with an unhappy temperament, nothing can make him happy; if he is born with a happy temperament, nothing can make him unhappy" (802).

Pain in Close-up

Twain had an instinctive and intimate connection to pain, but learning to utilize pain as creative capital took time. Mark Twain began his serious writing career in the Western Territories. It was the perfect crucible in which to refine the pain transformation. Leland Krauth describes the West as a place of "creative collision" between existing and emerging cultures (17). What was "right" and "acceptable" was in flux. Alfred Kazin is reluctant to allow that Twain's ties to the Wild West evidence a transgressive nature; instead, he argues that Twain was neither a wholesale renegade nor entirely immune to the unruliness of the territories (176). Adaptable, young, and curious, Twain found himself able to make the best of the unconventional West, even when it was unsettling. Twain's simultaneous "dismay" and "delight" in the turmoil of the frontier bode well for his daredevil navigation of other liminal spaces besides that between East and West. Twain would go on to explore the precarious lines between sin and righteousness, pain and pleasure, horror and entertainment.

Southwestern humor writing, on which Twain cut his literary teeth, implemented the full palate of pain in its landscapes. Violent revenge, foul insults, and humiliating nudity were all commonplace in American Southwestern humor. British humor writers were largely dismayed at the brutal nature of American

humor (Keough 4-5). Even the English language fell victim to the violence of the humorist's pen as authors attempted to recreate regional dialects in print. The prime example of this kind of violent storytelling is *Sut Lovingood*, a crude Appalachian caricature created by George Washington Harris, who delivers a nearly inexhaustible supply of pain-as-amusement stories.

In "Old Skissim's Middle Boy," *Sut Lovingood* proudly recounts how he once managed to wake up a boy who was notorious for his sleepiness. Although the boy's parents had already tried whipping him and scalding him with water, *Sut* finds a sure-fire solution. In a scene of rather creative sadism, *Sut* ties the boy to his chair, screws vices onto his ears, pours red pepper down his back, fills the front of his shirt with June bugs, and puts a rat up his pant leg so that it will bite its way "towards the back-bone" (G. Harris 69). He finally stirs the boy to consciousness with a basket of lit firecrackers, then rushes outside to enjoy the show with the neighbors. The enraged and fear-strengthened boy savages his family, one after the other, as they return from church. In the end, the experiment seems to be for *Sut's* amusement only, since the boy does not learn any lesson but sinks right back into his sleepy existence. *Sut Lovingood* concludes the story with this chilling resolution: "Ef ever I'se call'd on tu stop his sleepin eny more agin, I'll try a muskit an' sixteen buckshot, at jis' about ten steps" (74). Even the dignified conceit of Harris's well-spoken narrator fails to mask the crude exchange of pain-for-entertainment that occurs in and around the text.

Twain was a frequent consumer of such pain narratives; eventually, he began his own practice as a pain broker. Initially, he followed in the patterns set down by others. Tom Quirk notes that Twain's early humor never really leaves the realm of absurdity—people are two-dimensional playthings, and the gore of their demise is grotesque (and therefore intended to be amusing) in its extremity (*MTHN* 34-35). For better or worse, it was a reliable tactic for drawing in readers. When he took his first job as a newspaper editor in the territories in 1862, Twain quickly learned the rule of print: rape, murder, and abuse sold papers. Twain's account of the newspaper industry is quite saturated with violence.⁶ In *Roughing It*, Twain glibly recounts how, in the first weeks of his editorship at the *Territorial Enterprise* in Virginia City, his dull column was saved from obscurity by the killing of a man in a saloon. "Sir, you are a stranger to me," cries the young editor to the murderer, "but you have done me a kindness this day which I can never forget" (297). Exploiting pain as amusing content became standard practice for the young reporter. In an article for the San Francisco *Daily Morning Call* (August 31, 1864), Twain describes the bizarre occupants of the local jail, fishing for a laugh both in the ironic nickname "Gentle Julia" and the nonchalant response of the other inmates to her nauseating savagery:

"Gentle Julia" who spends eleven months of every year in the County Jail, on the average, bit a joint clear off one of the fingers of Joanna O'Hara, (an old offender—chicken thief,) in the 'dark cell,' in the

⁶ See Twain's 1869 burlesque, "Journalism in Tennessee," in which the narrator—in a single day as an editor at a Tennessee newspaper—is shot, beaten, thrown out a window, and scalped. Minus a finger, a scalp, and several teeth, he resigns rather than risk more "Southern hospitality."

station-house yesterday. The other women confined there say that it's the way Gentle Julia always fights. (qtd. in Keough 34-35)

Twain's famous "A Bloody Massacre Near Carson" also comes readily to mind, with its slashed throats, "reeking scalps," and scattered brain matter (57-58). Although Twain later admitted that these lurid details rather stole the show from his satire,⁷ they did their initial work of drawing the attention of the reading public, even if these additions distracted from the pleasure of the joke and ultimately ruined it. He knew a marketable commodity when he saw one, but he hadn't quite mastered the trade.

It was Twain's sensational pain-pandering that got him run out of Nevada in 1864. He started things off with humiliating insinuations⁸ about a Sanitary Dress Ball put on by the women of Carson City, meanwhile sniping at the honor of the *Union*, a rival Virginia City newspaper. The *Union*'s indignant rebuttal set off a series of escalating insults that culminated in Twain challenging *Union* editor, James Laird, to a duel. Reflecting on the episode in 1872, Twain explained his decision to abuse Laird without restraint (or provocation): "I was obliged to make the paper readable, and I could not fail in my duty to a whole community of subscribers merely to save the exaggerated sensitiveness of an individual" ("How I Escaped" 543). By his calculations, the collective pleasure of his reading audience in being witness to this volley of venom far outweighed whatever pain Laird may have felt.

⁷ See Twain's 1870 essay, "A Couple of Sad Experiences."

⁸ Twain implied that the profits from the fundraiser were going to a Miscegenation Society. Despite the inherent racism in Twain's reasoning that race mixing is shameful, the barb found its mark and scandalized Twain's targets.

Twain had not quite learned the delicate balance of pain and repayment, however, and this exchange cost him somewhat in reputation. Fearing the consequences of actually dueling Laird—a practice recently outlawed—Mark Twain declined to meet his adversary on the field and left Nevada for San Francisco. The *Gold Hills Daily News* let it be known that his departure was more than welcome:

Mark Twain's beard is full of dirt, and his face black before the people of Washoe. Giving way to the idiosyncratic eccentricities of an erratic mind, Mark has indulged in the game infernal—in short, 'played hell.' . . . The indignation aroused by his enormities has been too crushing to be borne by living man, though sheathed with the brass and triple cheek of Mark Twain. (qtd. in Keough 26)

Twain's conduct was, even by the most rudimentary measure, dishonorable. He gave the profits of one man's pain to his own readers to enjoy. He would struggle to accurately retell this life event for years, perhaps because he never quite figured out how to reset the balance without embellishing the facts.

Twain's experiments with the pain economy were not always so volatile, however, and he garnered some fans along the way. Rather than flinging pain back and forth, Twain began to work out the intricacies of the pain exchange. He understood, implicitly, Morreall's assertion that laughter can increase mental self-control by "reducing . . . negative emotions" and provide "an innocent and welcome release from stress, sadness, and other negative emotions" ("Comic Vices" 14). "If we laugh so that we do not weep," writes William Keough, "then we also laugh so that we do not explode or kill" (xxiii). Twain demonstrates an early understanding of this principle in his 1864 sketch, "Those Blasted Children." The boisterous

children of frontier politicians and wealthy miners are continually interrupting the narrator's work, but he knows that he has a unique recourse. "I will soothe my troubled spirit with a short season of blasphemy," he writes, "after which I will expose their infamous proceedings with a relentless pen" (72). Twain chooses between righteousness (i.e., suffering in silence) and retribution, which he attains through writing. Twain opts for the latter. Playing the curmudgeon, Twain designs the demise of the children with brutal "remedies" for childhood ailments—poisoning the children's tea with arsenic, removing their brains (to cure brain fever), amputating their lower jaws (to cure stuttering), drowning them in vinegar, etc.—for which he receives hearty thanks from their parents (75-77). The obvious exaggeration is the joke, and the laughter at the children's expense pays back the annoyance they gave our narrator friend.

As he perfected his craft, Twain's use of the pain economy developed from a fixed exchange to a dynamic interplay of factors. As it grew more nuanced and comprehensive for the author, it also grew more important. In "The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut" (1876), for instance, Twain allows his narrator to violate the pain economy to disastrous effect. Normally, people may only enjoy the "pleasure" of sinning if they are willing to endure the "pain" of conscience. But in this story, the conscience is first incarnated and then killed outright, allowing the narrator to indulge in a killing spree to settle old grievances, burn down an inconvenient house, and cheat a widow and her orphans out of their sustenance without a qualm (660). Free from his once-sadistic

conscience, Twain's narrator is also free from a balancing pain. "Since that day," he swoons, "my life is all bliss. Bliss, unalloyed bliss" ("Carnival" 660). "For Nietzsche, too," writes Sam Halliday, "'conscience' is an essentially repressive agency, whose office is to curb the pleasure one would otherwise, quite 'naturally,' derive from violence" (424). But whereas many read this story as Twain's rejection of his conscience, I contend that it uses humor to sort out some very important issues regarding the value of pain.

On one level, the depth of loathing the narrator has for his conscience and, following its elimination, the extremity of his carefree violence is cathartic for reader and author both. Laughing at his exploits and acknowledging their impossibility, we are relieved of the need to do them ourselves. Readers who, like myself, suffer under an overzealous conscience shake their fists at the crusty old dwarf for his unfair traps, his obsession with the past, and his knack for evoking self-loathing. We side with the narrator wholly, cheering for him, even as he tears the brute to shreds.

At this point, however, Twain pulls the rug from under us. As the "carnival of crime" unfolds, the fun of the crime quickly fades. Few readers can continue in rollicking empathy through thirty-eight murders and the abuse of a poor woman and her innocent children. Even under the umbrella of catharsis, we can't really justify that level of brutality as a desirable outcome. We may fantasize about the dissolution of the pain debt; we may sigh for a defanged conscience; but a world without a balanced pain economy—as Twain depicts it—is unequivocally horrible.

Twain was not content to leave the pain exchange in theoretical territory. To read Twain's texts is to actually participate in the pain economy. To be a fair economy, everyone must pay his or her fair share. Twain takes note of the reader's pleasure in imagining the demise of loud-mouthed children or a cruel conscience, and he will demand that the reader pay for his or her entertainment. We will take our turn as the butt of the joke, sometimes laughing at our own humiliating faults even before we know we are the targets. Take, for example, one of the "Pudd'nhead" epigrams from *Following the Equator*: "By trying we can easily learn to endure adversity. Another man's, I mean" (645). In the short span of these two sentences, Twain draws his reader into his game. In the first sentence, he puffs the reader's self-righteousness instinct, promising a sermon on fortitude and strength. But the second sentence—an abrupt "snapper" greatly favored by Twain—spurs a laugh with its unexpected conclusion that, in fact, we enjoy other people's pain a great deal more than our own. Self-recognition comes a second too late. Twain begins the next chapter with a nearly identical maxim: "Few of us can stand prosperity. Another man's, I mean" (655). The surprise ending is gone, but the repetition of form with a slight variation still provokes a laugh. If we understand these jokes enough to laugh at them (and therefore receive the pleasure of the joke), then we have to admit that we are guilty of the selfishness they imply.

Humor that has a particular purpose or target, Freud's "tendentious" joke, requires an audience to properly perform its function. "In general," explains Freud, "the tendentious joke requires three persons: apart from the one who is telling the

joke, it needs a second person who is taken as the object of the hostile or sexual aggression, and a third in whom the joke's intention of producing pleasure is fulfilled" (95). To be a joke, someone has to enjoy it. But the pleasure of the joke is not static. The humorist⁹ provides pleasure to his audience with their laughter, making them responsible, to some extent, for the pain contained in the joke itself, especially if the joke is designed to humiliate its target. Laughter is the third-person endorsement of targeted aggression of the joker against his or her enemy, says Freud; the audience is bribed into complicity by the pleasure of laughter (98). Although Freud's description makes the relationship between humorist and audience sound rather manipulative, Twain often obtains audience complicity for the sake of justice, not petty revenge.

The question is, how does the author get the audience to participate in a system that not only rewards but punishes them? The reader already stands at a distance from the pain, able to close the book at any time. Twain's listening audience could just as easily tune him out or write him off as a low comedian. They were not obliged to honor his pain exchange. Twain experiments with the kind of pain the audience experiences and the responses he can elicit in them. In 1877, Twain delivered a speech called "My Military History" at a dinner for "The Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company of Massachusetts." Presumably, his audience was

⁹ Freud makes a distinction between joking and humor, claiming that humor is an individual, non-communicative process that requires no secondary parties (221). I feel that this is a false distinction; the internal work of humor and the external validation sought by "tendentious joking" are not mutually exclusive but can occur simultaneously.

made up of war-seasoned veterans who had already paid their debt of suffering and could now safely enjoy the mishaps of Twain's troupe of would-be soldiers. The story centers on Ben Tupper, who "had a hard time" as a soldier (680). For the entertainment of the military audience, Ben Tupper is teased for his oversized feet, bitten by horses and rats, and especially disgraced for his city-boy indolence. The boys have tired themselves out, moving incessantly to avoid engaging the enemy. When the order comes that they must hold their ground and fight, they disband and go home. It is well that the shabby Rebel company in the story does not attack "the enemy," especially since the listening audience is composed of Union soldiers. Twain panders to the needs of his audience, delivering the pain of their enemies as entertainment.

Eight years later, in 1885, Twain published another version of the story in the *Century Magazine*. "The Private History of a Campaign that Failed" takes a strikingly different approach. When compared with other remembrances of the Civil War published by *Century*, Twain's war story is, by the author's admission, lacking in heroism or accomplishment. But he points out that his history is surprisingly common: "Thousands entered the war, got just a taste of it, and then stepped out again, permanently. These, by their very numbers, are respectable, and are therefore entitled to a sort of voice,—not a loud one, but a modest one; not a boastful one, but an apologetic one" (863). Twain promises inaction—titling the story the "campaign that failed" and pegging himself as "one who started out to do something in [the war], but didn't" (863)—and begs the reader's indulgence. Thus, Twain finagles his

reader into the elevated moral position of confessor, empowered to forgive or condemn the penitent author.

Immediately, Twain works to gain his reader's complicity . . . and commerce. Wooing the reader's support, he explains how hard it was to "get our bearings" in the early months of the war (863). Debates over political issues amount to little more than blustering contests between cocky young men; their convictions were not a matter of life and death. Twain describes his fellow "soldiers" in nostalgic, sentimental vignettes—we like and know these boys. Their adventures amount to shirking conflict and pestering horses—we find ourselves enjoying their hijinks and excusing them for their harmless Rebel allegiance. It is at this moment that they, in a high-strung panic, kill their man. In the aftermath of the shooting, the boys gather around the body of their supposed enemy; all thoughts of war have evaporated. "The thought shot through me that I was a murderer; that I had killed a man—a man who had never done me any harm," recalls the author (879). He furthermore loads onto his own balance sheet the suffering of the dead man's innocent wife and child.

The reader is caught in a difficult position. We like the boys, but their guilt is obvious. Regardless of how we might wish to excuse them for their inexperience and fear, we agree with the author that they did wrong to kill this unarmed, ununiformed man. The boys cling to the hollow assurance that "he was killed in war; killed in fair and legitimate war" (879-80). And here lays the trap: *Century Magazine* drew readers with its accounts of glorious battles and daring war heroes from both sides of the conflict; now these same readers were caught in the middle of Twain's

pain economy, charged with the job of assigning guilt on the battlefield. The sympathetic protagonist adds to the weight of the decision as he ponders his first legitimate casualty: “And it seemed to me an epitome of war: that all war must be just that—the killing of strangers against whom you feel no personal animosity; strangers whom, in other circumstances, you would help if you found them in trouble, and who would help you if you needed it” (880). Unlike the previous telling of the same experience, the goal here is not to reward the pain and suffering of the audience with a well-deserved laugh over someone else’s humiliation. Instead, Twain asks his readers to make a moral reckoning of the pain and pleasure exchange, not only for these charming boys but for the heroes of war, as well. By refusing to reward or transform the pain, Twain makes us aware of the imbalance and our complicity in injustice. Twain kept his readers in a carefully constructed tension, both distant from the main brunt of the pain but still active participants in the repayment of debts.

Twain sometimes masks his invitation to the pain economy in traditional forms, luring his audience into a false sense of security. Fulton advises us that whenever Mark Twain seems to be using a “proper” form, *because* it is Mark Twain, we ought to expect parody (2). Twain is not a trailblazer, creating wholly new styles of writing to bring us into the pain economy. Instead, Twain places his traps on the trail we’re already on. In the *Equator* examples above, Twain parodies wisdom literature to weasel his way into the reader’s psyche—luring the reader on to what seems high moral ground and then revealing the truth of their shameful position. In

his early writings, a similar bait-and-switch technique appears in the form of the hoax. In the hoaxes, Twain baits readers with the “truth” they want and then springs the trap and reveals them to be the butt of the joke.

With the advent of the telegraph, nineteenth-century readers felt increasingly confident that the truth was reported in the pages of their local newspapers. Walter Benjamin sees this kind of informational writing as the antithesis of storytelling because it depends so heavily on believability:

“Information . . . lays claim to prompt verifiability. The prime requirement is that it appear ‘understandable in itself’” (89). The no man’s land that lies between information and invention was irresistible to Twain. Using the newspaper form as his mask, he performs a parody of information, making the reader an actor in a parable of gullibility or pain-lust. Perhaps we only believe what we want to be true with no regard for the implications for those around us. When what we want is the report of injury, our gratification takes on moral tones and opens our credit line in the pain economy.

“A Bloody Massacre at Carson” demonstrates the power of the combination of pain-baiting and informational parody. Readers took Twain’s absurdly farfetched account of violence as fact and were generally appalled, yet the piece was reprinted widely. Years later, Twain concluded that his readers’ horrified enjoyment over other people’s pain distracted them from the “poor little moral” of the story, an exposé of San Francisco newspapers failing to properly report business fraud at the expense of vulnerable private investors (“Couple of Sad” 393-94). “I made the

horrible details so carefully and conscientiously interesting that the public simply devoured *them* greedily” and passed over the accusations of editorial misconduct (393). Watching a man read the article, Twain observed, “He *never got down* to where the satire part of it began. Nobody ever did. They found the thrilling particulars sufficient” (394). Unaware of the fact that he is being fooled, the reader demonstrates an ample pleasure in another’s pain, and he does not seek any ethical resolution. Twain expected that at least some of his readers would be outraged at the report of violence and exact repayment from the truly guilty parties, but they were nearly uniformly satisfied with the story itself. Twain allows for one other explanation of why hoax was accepted as truth: “in some instances, the reader is a person who never tries to deceive anybody himself, and therefore is not expecting any one to wantonly practice a deception upon *him*; and in this case the only person dishonored is the man who wrote the burlesque” (388-89). The readers may determine for themselves which is true of them.

The hoax would remain one of Twain’s favorite tools, though he would refine his technique somewhat. Parody itself is a kind of hoax, mad-capping within an accepted form; the canny reader of hoax or parody will sort the authentic from the absurd, the flippant from the sincere. As an example, let us consider Twain’s 1870 short story, “An Awful- - -Terrible Medieval Romance.” The story declares itself to be a romance (however awful and terrible), and it delivers its share of melancholy plot twists. The protagonist, Conrad, was born a female but the child’s father passed Conrad off as male in the hopes of claiming the throne from a cousin, Constance.

Conrad pleads to let cousin Constance rule, but Conrad's father is determined to see his heir on the throne. Nefarious plots ensue: seduction, disgrace, and deceit galore!

By measure of the pain economy, the balance is horribly askew from the very beginning. The secret of Conrad's true sex is protected with murder, even from the moment of his (her) birth—anyone who saw the baby girl and knew her to be female was killed immediately. Conrad's hope of succession (which it pains Conrad to claim) depends on Constance's disappointment. What promises to be a nearly Shakespearean comedy of mistaken gender identity and power politics finds itself mired in the problems of pain and pleasure imbalance. Gestures meant as kindness become the source of grief. The contest of pain and profit comes to a head when Constance, pregnant out of wedlock and therefore banned forever from the throne, maliciously names Conrad as the father of her child—a charge that carries the penalty of death. Twain arranges the story so that Conrad is doomed to die no matter what (s)he does. It is a tangled web of offense and suffering in which almost no one is wholly blameless. Rather than untangle it for us, Twain simply washes his hands of the matter and abandons Conrad abruptly, toying with the convention of the cliffhanger that would ostensibly sell more papers at the expense of the character's pain.

The reader, who has presumably been reading eagerly as the characters suffer, is essentially jilted; there is no resolution. We may protest at this betrayal of authorial duty, but we must meanwhile ask ourselves what we wanted to happen and why we were invested in the story in the first place. Whose side are we on? Who

deserves to suffer—as someone must—for all these many sins? If we squirm under the displeasure of an unfinished story, don't we deserve our frustration, given the pleasure we took in another's pain?

Twain lays the trap for his readers time and again. He offers travel writing, nostalgic novels, historical romance like bait. "Every substantial work of fiction that he wrote for the rest of his life has hoaxes at its core—some of them extremely subtle and sophisticated and very serious," writes Laurence Berkove ("Nevada Influences" 164). Often, Twain's hoaxes target someone deserving of a minor pain—be it the presumably self-righteous reader or a public figure whose actions require scrutiny. Embarrassment at being fooled or the sudden focus of public scorn repays the debt of their sins.

There are times, however, when it seems as if perfectly innocent people are swept up in the hoax and bear a burden they did not earn by the measures of the pain economy. "In Twain, good people or bad can be the perpetrators or the butts of a hoax," observes Keough, "... and often Twain seems to slip back and forth between enjoyment and condemnation" (46). In those times when Twain seems to be enjoying an unjustified prank his writing abandons justice as its goal. A balanced pain economy is an ideal, not a reality. Whatever force there may be to return to a balance between pain and pleasure, in the real world, seems fickle at best. We might be promised a fair and just world, but every day we suffer unearned pains and reap unearned pleasures. For Twain, this is the most brazen hoax of all. "[The hoax] was one of two distinguishing constituents of his style," Berkove writes. "The other was

theological: his growing conviction that God was malevolent. . . . Briefly stated, the ubiquity of hoaxes Twain saw in Nature and the fatal affinity for hoaxes he saw in human nature merged with his belief in a vindictive Deity” (“Nevada Influences” 164-65). Twain reconstructs God’s hoaxes on the page to demonstrate that this supposedly loving creator doles out pain and pleasure without regard for fairness.¹⁰

Pain at a Distance

Suffering may be the raw capital of the pain economy, but it is not immediately pleasurable. The transformation of pain is work. By relating to pain through the medium of the text, Twain provides a way for himself and his readers to do the work of pain transformation at something of a remove. The text creates a distance from pain in several important ways.

There is agreement among humor theorists that humor and laughter create distance between those laughing and the object of their amusement. On the most basic level, those who laugh are not thinking about why they are laughing or evaluating the meaning of the joke in the context of a suffering world; they are merely submitting to the physical event of laughter. But humor is more comprehensive than that. John Morreall writes, “The humorous attitude is a disengaged, distanced attitude, one in which we look at the world from at least one step back” (“New Theory” 258). Critchley adds, “Laughter gives us a distance on everyday life, and there is a certain coldness at its core” (*On Humour* 87). By

¹⁰ See Chapter Five for more about how Twain parodies, revises, and rewrites God’s creation on the page.

removing us from our intensely close relationship with the troubled world, humor opens a new vision of how things can be. Felicity Lunn remarks, “[I]n challenging the norm and permitting the glimpse of alternatives, humour reflects art’s ‘pathos of distance,’ its expression of the human ability to relate abstractly to the world bringing us back to the everyday by estranging us from it” (“Pathos” 37). As she describes it, the ultimate goal of humor is not simply to distance; humor reveals that the accepted reality may have “alternatives.” Rather than leaving us adrift, it restores our contact with the world.

It is a paradoxical effect. Henri Bergson declares that “laughter has no greater foe than emotion” (2). Laughter, claims Bergson, squelches pity, and empathy destroys the comic mood. The whole of the laughing audience focuses its intelligence—in lieu of emotions—on the object of their laughter (Bergson 4). Sometimes, as is often the case in Twain, the object of laughter is the author himself, in recollection of some past humiliation. Yet the humor of observing another person’s pain can often go hand in hand with the memory of one’s own pain. Morreall suggests that laughter at “fictional jokes” stems from “the ability to laugh at our own experiences” (“Comic Vices” 17). The humorist can use the unemotional intellectuality available through humor to allow the audience members to read their own experiences at a remove.

Humor’s ability to distance the audience does not necessarily translate into an engagement in the pain economy, however. In “How to Tell a Story,” Twain instructs the humorist to “conceal the fact that he even dimly suspects that there is

anything funny ” when he tells a story (201). For contrast, Twain presents the teller of the “comic story,” who takes obvious pleasure in telling it, laughing almost to the point of being unable to deliver the “nub,” then repeating it as many times as he can. “It is a pathetic thing to see,” bemoans the practiced humorist (201). This second joke-teller claims all the pleasure for himself, robbing his audience of their full enjoyment—and therefore surrendering the right to pain them with his joking. Freud confirms Twain’s assessment, arguing that an effective joke is told straight-faced, so the listener—rather than the creator of the joke—receives the pleasure (140).

If the audience begins to pull away, offended by the underlying message of the humor, the humorist can always fall back on the explanation that it’s “just a joke” and brush away any complaints of unjust treatment. Humor allows a wide margin of deniability. Morreall explains that humorous amusement does not require that the person feeling the amusement sustain “beliefs about what properties” the object has, nor even have a specifically “positive or negative attitude toward an object of amusement” (“Humor and Emotion” 298). Whether or not there is truth beneath the joke, we experience amusement as pleasant, and we’ll come back for more. In any other context, the audience may judge the content of the humorous statement as offensive, painful, or entirely dishonest, but because they were laughing, they tolerate the ostensible “pain” embedded in the joke. “Amusement . . . is pleasant not in that the thing which amuses us is pleasing to us—often amusing objects are

unattractive and even potentially repulsive—but in that our observing it or thinking about it is a pleasant experience” (Morreall, “Humor and Emotion” 298-99).

But there are limits to humor’s power to distract from pain. We laugh because we need relief from pain, not because we have escaped pain entirely. “Jokes are the expression of an *abstract* relation to the world,” Critchley notes (*On Humour* 62). The abstraction that we win by our participation in the joke pushes us into the consideration of our existence, suffering and all. Humorists, like Twain, tempt us with the promise of distance through laughter, only to turn our eyes back to our troubles, once we’ve stepped away. “[N]o one wants to get to know their unconscious,” Freud reasons, “so the most convenient thing is to deny the possibility completely” (157). The physicality of laughter may initially distract us from the unconscious; the powerful energy of humor may momentarily suppress empathy and emotion; the mental processes of amusement may provide a logical framework for separation; but, ultimately, humor situates us so that we must look back on our world—ourselves included—and judge.

Here, humor employs another important distancing tool: retrospection. Autobiographical writing, says Twain, “is always two things: it is an absolute lie and it is an absolute truth. The author of it furnishes the lie, the reader of it furnishes the truth” (41 378). Remembering the past changes it. In the moment of injury, the pain is too close and unwieldy; it requires some kind of frame—a lie—to complete the transformation. Tom Quirk observes that, although Twain’s narrative persona reports the exploits of the young Twain character faithfully, he does so with the

indulgent and wise distance of age (*MTHN* 65). Once young and rash and intimate with pain, the author as he addresses his readers through the text is a more mature and stable figure, able to judge his younger self at a distance from the trauma of his misadventures.

Krauth argues that Twain's return to the past is a means of superimposing propriety over the indiscretions of youth (65). When Twain writes about the abandoned duel that led to his flight from Nevada, says Krauth, the author "uses fancy and humor to conceal and dispel the confusion, aggression, and embarrassment of his actual conduct, inventing new events and exaggerating the real ones until they are ludicrous" (25). The very presence of humor, however, indicates that Twain is not as removed from the pain of the memory as he might like us to believe. He needs the laughter to transform the pain—still puissant—into pleasure. In "How I Escaped Being Killed in a Duel" (one of his many attempts to write up his Nevada duel and its repercussions), Twain repays his own embarrassment by laughing over the matter in public. To do so, he must lie. He rewrites some important details—for instance, the "How I Escaped" story about fooling his opponent into believing he was a deadly shot and scaring him off of the duel. In reality, he provoked his opponent and then, in fear, abandoned the field. Twain's return to the story, time after time, indicates that the pain and shame remain in need of transformation. He is the masochist returning to the same scene of humiliation over and over, playing it with minute variations in hopes of finding

payoff from the pain. Distance from pain, it should be noted, is not a disengagement from pain.

Twain perfected the paradoxically engaged-yet-distant relationship with pain for our benefit. His very writing persona—Mark Twain—serves as a reassuring façade between his readers and the suffering towards which he entices us. Because “Mark Twain” is a tenant of the text, perhaps there is no way for him to gain distance from pain. As Quirk points out, Twain is *not* a detached spectator of humanity, depersonalizing through distance—though Clemens may be—he enters in with the full brunt of his personality, both in his literature and in his public appearances, but this glad-handing sociability was an economic strategy, not a philosophy (*MTHN* 30-31). Perhaps this engaging Twain is, as Quirk suggests, a play for financial success. Perhaps the pain-peddling Twain is simply a prudent business tool employed by Clemens, not a psychological tool to provide himself and his readers with the distance needed to tolerate continuous contact with pain. And perhaps Mark Twain serves both ends at the same time. Twain seems to understand what people are willing to pay for, whether they pay with hard cash, moral restitution, or their own discomfort. If Twain exhausts his readers’ tolerance for pain, bringing it too close for too long without any payoff, he loses all potential profit.

Within the text, “Mark Twain” becomes a comic character, as much a part of the story as any of his inventions. But even though this seems to place him inextricably close to the pain he writes about, the very comicality of his character allows for a degree of distance between author and text. “A comic character is never

fully identified with his role,” explains Slavoj Žižek; “he always retains the ability to observe himself from outside: ‘making fun of himself’” (54-55). Twain made full use of the comic distance afforded him in this textual position. Krauth describes the recurring comic figure of the “innocent” Twain of the early writings, naïvely believing all and suffering all, as “a rhetorical stance, as a style of discourse adapted for isolated comic effects; it could well be defined as an extended—or repeated—joke” (43). Mark Twain constantly runs the pain-pleasure exchange through his authorial body¹¹ without the danger of real harm. He is as indestructible as Wile E. Coyote. That said, his pain is not meaningless. “Work carried out on one’s own body,” writes Heike Munder, “exhibits, in the most succinct manner, personal pain boundaries as well as those of society, and puts them to the test” (15). Twain, as comic character, finds those limits for his readers’ benefit.

Mark Twain is constantly running the pain-pleasure exchange through his authorial body. Think of his agony at the Parisian barber in *Innocents Abroad*, his middle-of-the-night collisions with furniture in *A Tramp Abroad*, or even his cycles of mental anguish, triumph, and disillusionment trying to memorize the ever-shifting river in *Life on the Mississippi*. The pleasures earned by his pain are rarely his alone, at least not directly.

¹¹ I refer to Mark Twain’s authorial body as it occurs on the page or in relation to the text. “Mark Twain”—as opposed to Samuel Clemens—is a creature of the text, a literary being, and I refer to this aspect of the author, not necessarily the correlative “real life” experience (though, of course, the experiences of this body often factor into the text).

In one self-inflicted pain experiment, Twain agrees to take a tonic called the “wake-up-Jake” at a natural springs resort. Dizzying nausea is followed by twelve hours of ceaseless vomiting, diarrhea, and nosebleeds. It bears asking why the writer undertakes his awful experiment in the first place. Twain explains:

I was not aware that I had any use for the wonderful ‘wake-up,’ but then I felt it to be my duty to try it, in order that a suffering public might profit by my experience—and I would cheerfully see that public suffer perdition before I would try it again. (“Letter from Steamboat Springs” 35)

The narrator begrudges his sacrifice, but his experiment has been as success: he has traded in his tale of pain for the benefit of his audience (albeit they glean more amusement than health). He will gladly let them pay for the next round, however.

The pain play in the author’s body is not totally selfless. The distance he achieves through his public experiments allows him to continue trading in the pain economy. Cowan notes that there is a change in the masochist when the practice is public: “During the [masked] exhibition, the masochist loses his sense of interiority, of the depth and privacy of his inner drama” (125). In this way, despite the story that goes on behind the mask, Twain can use his position as performer in the text to introduce pain without really internalizing it. For Robinson, Twain’s need for distance is evidenced strongly in his travel literature. When Twain’s comic posturing ceases,¹² says Robinson, emotional turmoil appears:

¹² Robinson refers to the “impersonation” described by James Cox in *Mark Twain: The Fate of Humor*. Cox claims that Twain “impersonates” conventional voices in his humor, often to the point where it is difficult to distinguish between Twain’s sincere expression and his parodic imitations.

Little wonder that Mark Twain gives great emphasis in his narrative to the pleasures of remote perspectives on experience—to moonlit vistas, dreamless sleep, and the amelioration wrought by time on memory. Against this backdrop, his penchant for impersonation may be viewed as a leading manifestation of his efforts to “distance” himself from painful freaks of consciousness brought on by the experience of travel. (“Innocent” 32)

As with any evasion, however, it is the thing being avoided that really drives the action. The constant presence and value of pain is evidenced by the ceaseless efforts of the author to distance himself (and us) from it. Whether avoided or sought, pain underwrites Twain’s work. It is no wonder he keeps close tabs on its exchange.

In one notable exception, Twain discards the protection of distance and engages his pain without the cover of his pseudonym. Here is a shame he means to own, to cherish, and not to transform. In “A True Story, Repeated Word for Word as I Heard It,” the narrator is not called “Mark Twain” but “Misto C—” by the main character of the story, Aunt Rachel. He has her do this, says Quirk, to “absorb more completely the guilt and humiliation that properly belong to him” (*MTHN* 86). This intimacy with his shame makes the story, in which the former slave dismantles her employer’s casual ignorance of how one might find joy in the midst of ultimate sorrow, a narrative of his education in suffering. The guilt is his; he has earned it, and he will *not* let Mark Twain stand in as a comic character in this scene. Significantly, “Aunt Rachel” is an invented name for a real woman, Mary Ann Cord, whom Twain knew well. Cord was a long-term member of Susan Crane’s household in Elmira, where the Clemenses summered. Via pseudonym, Twain grants her the distance from pain that denies himself.

Conclusion

Twain's intimacy with pain was instinctive, almost involuntary. His inborn attraction to guilt and shame was frustrated by the inconsistencies of religious morality, so Twain began to hash out his own laws of suffering and retribution. Through experimentation, Twain learned that pain could be transformed—through writing and through his authorial person—into pleasure. His audience would literally pay for the amusement they gained at his past humiliations. The pain economy proved to be more than a means of financial gain, however. It was a moral system. Through the text, Twain sought justice by engaging his audience, his subjects, and himself in the investments of the pain economy. In the following chapter, I will describe in more detail how Twain developed his system for pain-based moral judgment in contrast to the prevailing conceptions of sin and responsibility.

CHAPTER TWO: Guilt and Innocence

With a mix of subversive mockery and genuine enjoyment, both celebrating and complicating the functions of power, masochistic play adopts the rules of “acceptable” behavior and recreates scenes of transgression and punishment. Mark Twain, who I have argued is something of a literary masochist, experiments with the tropes of power and punishment in the same way. Through a masochistic submission to an oppressive, conventional moral system, Twain becomes a critic of it. Twain enters, examines, and parodies the scenes of traditional morality, ultimately replacing the moral judgments of the old system with the measurements of the pain economy. In this chapter, I will explore Twain’s adoption of the conventional role of writer-as-moralist and the ways that he constructs his pain-based morality in opposition to—and, consequently, under the powerful influence of—traditional models of right and wrong, both religious and public.

When I speak of the “traditional” or “conventional” moral system to which Twain was reacting, I employ a crude shorthand for a truly complex set of ideals, both religious and social. The multiple reform movements of the nineteenth century were clamoring for supremacy, each professing to have the ultimate Truth about God, health, or government. One effect of this capitalistic “multiplicity” of ideas is that it removed the power to dictate right and wrong from any one individual and

seemingly placed it within the broader society (Foucault 210). The idea of the United States as a “Christian nation,” despite the innumerable and widely divergent denominations, underlines this point. In Twain’s time, “sin” took on social as much as religious meanings until, as Kenneth Andrews writes of the community at Nook Farm, “good taste became the standard by which an individual judged his own behavior and that of his neighbors. It was still immoral to sin, but it became also inadvisable to give the impression of being a sinner” (106). Despite its divorce from a single, settled doctrine, the social definition of sin and righteousness functioned as a strict adjudicator of acceptable behavior.

At home, writes Susan K. Harris, there raged an inter-Christian moral contest, in which each side defended its “good Christian” status by showing all others to be “bad Christians” (“Christian Mission” 39). But on the world stage, Americans sought a unified identity. Although we think of Twain as a downhome boy, he was an international traveler and speaker throughout his life, and it often suited him to treat a unified Christian American identity—the “national Christian,” Harris names it, “the figure representing the virtues of rationalist democracy fused with the moral zeal of the Protestant believer” (39)—as the primary American figure.

Twain became familiar with the “national Christian” early in his career. In *The Innocents Abroad*, Twain doubly denounces the American tourist, once for his sins as an American and once for his sins as a Christian. Americans abroad are both iconoclastic—“image-breakers and tomb desecraters,” Twain calls them (*Innocents* 493)—and absurdly reverential towards the holy ground, be it the Ufizzi or the

Dome of the Rock, as dictated by their guidebooks. But for every story that Twain tells on the pilgrims, he tells three on himself. He takes on the full identity of the American abroad. He embarrasses himself in front of young ladies, ravages temples, and makes a maudlin show of his piety. He enthusiastically affirms his commonality with the objects of his criticism, perhaps because he has such profitable plans for the shame this association will bring him. The masochist engages in a “soul’s quest and question concerning the meaning of suffering. To love one’s fate is to suffer it. To suffer necessity willingly, and with love, is preeminently a religious task” (Cowan 120). So Twain binds himself to the common identity of the American Christian—though his understanding of Christianity skews rather Presbyterian—so that he can be more easily punished with his fellows. As a result, Twain sometimes tends to lump the forces of religion and culture together.

Other moral forces depend on guilt, not as a measurement but as an identity. One particular strain of thought in criminology, says Michel Foucault, “establishes the ‘criminal’ as existing before the crime and even outside it” (220). The criminal is a kind of person to be managed and disciplined because of who they are. So, too, the sinner. John Calvin’s doctrine of “total depravity” applies the guilty label to all of mankind as a matter of course. After charging Adam with “infidelity,” “ambition,” “rebellion,” “lust,” and “contempt” for the word of God, Calvin concludes that Adam “did his very utmost to annihilate the whole glory of God” (bk. II ch. 1 sec. 4). His identity as a sinner is hereditary. “All of us, therefore, descending from an impure

seed, come into the world tainted with the contagion of sin. Nay, before we behold the light of the sun we are in God's sight defiled and polluted" (II.1.5).

Twain, whose Presbyterian religious education was rooted in Calvin's theology, also preaches of the "damned human race." But Twain differs with Calvin when it comes to responsibility. For Twain "damned" is both an adjective, reflecting on the low character of the human race, and a verb, indicating that we are being cursed by someone else. Even as Twain criticizes his fellow man, he never forgets the wrongs done to them. "And you will remember that in the case of Adam's posterity *all* the billions are innocent—*none* of them had a share in his offence, but the Deity holds them guilty to this day. None gets off, except by acknowledging that guilt—no cheaper lie will answer" (Twain, *Bible According* 255). The guilt of Original Sin is unfair and unearned. Twain *will* take humanity to task for the pain it has caused, but he will do the same for God. Twain's moral economy is an objective reckoning of pain and pleasure, more diagnosis than prescription. His single reform is the balance of pain and pleasure.

The Writer as Moralist

There was heavy pressure on nineteenth-century authors to channel their writings into properly instructive conduits. Good writing was uplifting of mind and soul alike. Even as realism took hold in the post-bellum American literary style, the conflict over "sermonizing" in literature remained at the fore. Although literary figures like W. D. Howells and Henry James protested against blatant moralizing, the

pressure remained for authors to ennoble with writing, to avoid excessively violent or vulgar depictions of “real life,” and to stay true to the moral sensibilities of their audiences (Shi 121-123). Although wary of leaning too heavily on the thinking of the past, Ralph Waldo Emerson valued literature, in part, for its ability to transform raw experience into a more spiritual “truth” (“American Scholar” 66). Nathaniel Hawthorne does not reject the moral role of literature but merely suggests that the author ought to weave a “high truth” into his writing so completely that it “is never any truer, and seldom any more evident, at the last page than at the first” (1387). Even the Prince of Humbug, P. T. Barnum, whose 1855 autobiography garnered almost universal bursts of moral outrage from reviewers, pandered to the notion of writer as moralist in the preface to his book. “I trust . . . that in the comic incidents herein related, I have recorded nothing that will shock the feelings of the most fastidious, while many of them, producing harmless laughter, will be found to convey a good practical lesson” (8). The standards of Victorian American authorship that Twain learned as a young author persisted, even as he became well-known.

Twain’s move to Hartford brought him into close contact with writers who subscribed to the moral instruction model. Twain’s neighbors at Nook Farm, Harriet Beecher Stowe and Charles Dudley Warner, saw themselves as wise benefactors to their audiences:

They assumed that the growing literate class was comprised of educable citizens who desired to increase the fullness of their lives by reading, to add to their stock of information about the world, to improve themselves in the direction of a moral culture, and to seek relief from their own surroundings in literary reaction. (Andrews 159)

A trainable morality and morally instructive writing went hand-in-hand. Harriet Beecher Stowe, assumed that her readers had a hunger for morality to be “informally preached and suitably illustrated” in their reading material (Andrews 159). Twain’s sometime literary collaborator, Charles Dudley Warner, acknowledged that a novel could (and perhaps should) serve to entertain, but he maintained that it should also be “elevating” (160).

Twain knew that he was supposed to create purposeful, uplifting writing, but—whether because his writing career was spawned in the lawless West or simply from some perversity of nature—he pushed against the expectation. He used the most extreme version of moral writing, the Sunday-school story, to debate both the form and the content of morally instructive writing. Having acquired his religious education in the era of the American Sunday-School Union, Twain was surrounded by this kind of morality literature, and he knew the script by heart. Grammatically correct and highly instructive, the Sunday-school stories told of upright young Christians meekly following God’s will and receiving their eternal reward in heaven. But for Twain, the lessons never quite took like they were supposed to. Learning that he could purchase books from the Sunday-school library with prize tickets, young Sammy Clemens cheated his way to a fistful of tickets, but he found the cast of perfectly moral children depicted in the books to be unsatisfying and incomprehensible. “They were pretty dreary books, for there was not a bad boy in the entire bookcase. They were *all* good boys and good girls and

drearily uninteresting, but they were better society than none, and I was glad to have their company and disapprove of it" (A1 418).

In adulthood, that "disapproval" took the form of satire. Twain ridiculed both the insufferable personal virtue of Sunday-school heroes and the divine Providence they preached. Frustrated with the inconsistencies of the religious worldview, he turned the axioms back on themselves. When Twain writes "All things that happen, happen for a purpose" (BA 236), you may be sure that he is not expressing humble resignation to the will of God. In this case, he is telling the story of how God turned Noah's Ark around to rescue a fly carrying typhoid fever. All things might happen for a purpose, Twain agrees, but have you stopped to ask what that purpose is?

As a satirist, it was never within Twain's purview to dismantle the object of his ridicule. If it were, he would be in danger of writing himself out of a job. Instead, he uses his writing to exploit the targeted structure, idea, or form for its comedic absurdities. Like Hank Morgan in the frontispiece of *Connecticut Yankee*, Twain naughtily inserts a twig up one nostril of the stately stone lion, but he leaves his sledgehammer at home. Even as he danced around the morality tale and pointed out all its most embarrassing implausibilities, Twain quite respected the concepts of right and wrong. In fact, as Leland Krauth makes clear, Twain's basic morality is "highly orthodox," even if he quibbles over the details of its expression (190).

Twain did not easily forgive the Sunday-school tales their sins of expression, however. With Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Twain was more inclined to celebrate the "bad" boy than the good one, and he resented a worldview that excluded him. The

message of the religious books, tracts, and magazines was overt: 'Be good, children; and everyone will love you, God will reward you, and you will go to Heaven when you die.' There was no place for a good-hearted rascal like Tom Sawyer or Huck Finn. There was no explanation for good people suffering and the bad going unpunished. Publications such as the *Sabbath School Treasury* and *Youth's Companion* inundated young readers with narratives about how dying children could convert field hands with their dying breath and vain, beautiful girls were actually less lovely than industrious ones. They preached humility, generosity, honesty, and piety as their own reward. The children in the stories are preposterous models of virtue, even in their "flawed" moments. Edwin, the hero of Julia A. Fletcher's tale, "The Boy Who Loved Truth," earns the prestigious title of best-behaved boy in the class. Observing that Edwin seems to be racked with guilt by the honor, the teacher confronts him. He confesses readily. His sin? "I made signs to Arthur to lend me a slate pencil," he admits, full of shame (77). He compounds his virtuousness by suggesting that Arthur is, in fact, more worthy of the honor because he ignored Edwin's attempts to get his attention. One can hardly imagine young Sam Clemens reading this tale and finding inspiration in a boy who indulges in such ludicrous self-reproach. If he was going to feel guilty, he might as well do something worth feeling guilty for!

Twain's 1870 sketch, "The Story of the Good Little Boy Who Did Not Prosper," is a direct attack on the morality tale. As we might suspect, Twain sympathizes with the naughty boys in the story. Like the other bad boys, Twain is mystified by the good boy, Jacob Blivens, who willingly gives up the boyish pleasures of lying and

playing hookey in favor of industriousness and punctuality. But Jacob knows what he is about—he has his eye on becoming a Sunday-school hero, and he knows that moral glory comes at great personal cost. “He knew it was not healthy to be good. He knew it was more fatal than consumption to be so supernaturally good as the boys in the books were” (375). In the tracts and pamphlets, the good little boys tend to die melodramatic deaths, pointing others to holiness in their final hours. And, indeed, Jacob Blivens is blown to smithereens for all his righteous efforts. The “good little boy” is an obvious fiction (we know no boys who behave like Jacob Blivens) and a satirical one, at that. Anyone who follows Jacob Blivens’ example stands very little chance of improving his or anyone else’s life. In the end, it turns out Twain believes in the need for self-improvement, but real morality begins by laughing off this unrealistic monstrosity. To Twain, the Sunday-school tale reflects the “intrinsically comic” aspect of human nature, “motivated by false artificial ideals it believes are sacred truths” (Brodwin 224).

Just as comical as schoolboy piety, however, is the more adult tendency to feign virtue when in the public eye. Twain knew that a public devotion to “sacred truths” does not effect change in a person’s life but more often keeps change from happening. To prove his point, Twain turns to the Sunday-school teachers themselves, specifically John D. Rockefeller, Jr. When teaching on Jesus’ instruction to the rich young man to sell all he has and give the proceeds to the poor, Rockefeller ducks out of the burden to impoverish himself. Jesus was instructing the young man to get rid of anything that might distract him from his Christian duties,

interprets Rockefeller. “The inference was plain,” writes Twain. “Young John’s father’s millions and his own were a mere incident in their lives and not in any way an obstruction in their pursuit of salvation” (41 422). But there is hardly a trained theologian who would come to a different conclusion, Twain adds. Rockefeller’s spiritual lessons *are* absurd, but they are also part and parcel of American Christianity. “The entire nation laughs [at Rockefeller], yet in its innocent dullness never suspects that it is laughing at itself” (421).

The problem with the Sunday-school literature and Rockefeller’s teaching is not that they try to teach right and wrong. It is that they fail. The values are all out of proportion. Adherents to these teachings will end up out of balance in the pain economy—either because they suffer too much or too little. Instead of using laughter as a tool for restoring balance, the self-designated keepers of Western culture and decency—saints, Puritans, and philosophers—have long considered laughter a ‘vice’ (Morreall, “Comic Vices” 2). Laughter is the sound of debauchery, rising from taverns and bawdy theaters, not churches or classrooms. For many Christians, unrequited suffering is fundamentally holy—martyrdom and self-sacrifice form the pinnacle of spiritual elevation. The devout must thank God for their suffering, which brings them closer to the person of Christ. “[W]e boast in our sufferings,” writes the apostle Paul, “knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rom. 5:3-5). The only pleasure promised or sought

is eternal salvation. Unless, Twain would note, you are a priest or a Sunday-school teacher seeking to justify your earthly comforts as the blessings of God.

Twain was unconvinced. The payback for suffering in the religious model was too uncertain, too conditional. In rejecting the morality tale, Twain did not excuse himself from the responsibility to uphold a standard of morality. For Mark Twain, proof of morality was revealed not through espousing orthodox doctrine but by providing beneficial effect. Twain's morality reflects what Jonathan Haidt calls a liberal Western morality, valuing fairness and a freedom from harm above things like sanctity and authority (125). Twain placed these considerations far below his most basic "foundation" of morality—balance. Pain must be paid back. Period.

Much of Twain's readership, and even his family and friends, *did* consider things like sanctity, authority, and group loyalty as part of morality. Twain was familiar with this viewpoint—both his mother and his wife were religious, and one of his best friends was a minister—but he never had the requisite faith to be a proper Christian himself. From outside of the circle of devout religious believers, Twain was witness to the fact that "[s]acredness binds people together, and then blinds them to the arbitrariness of the practice" (Haidt 257). Twain bristled at the abuses effected by this "arbitrary" worldview, but, as with many of Twain's targets, he did not dismantle it. Instead, he satirized religious doctrines, even exaggerated and enlarged them, so that they could support the full weight of his criticism.

Divine Providence, the idea that God is in total control of all circumstances, became one of Twain's favorite religious ideas to criticize. A God with absolute

responsibility is on the hook for a great deal of pain. If God's law is expressed in the natural order, "requiring no watching, no correcting, no readjusting while the eternities endure" (BA 219), then God is the absentee landlord, and whatever pain falls on his hapless tenants is his responsibility. If God is consciously directing all events in human life, then his offense is greater, and Twain will apply the moral code of the pain economy to God as rigorously as God's was ever applied to man.

In his way, Twain honored the expectation that he produce purposeful, instructive writing, though he substituted his own standards of righteousness. His friends, especially those with allegiances to the standards of traditional morality, were eager to point this out. W. D. Howells writes of Mark Twain, "He was a youth to the end of his days, the heart of a boy with the head of a sage" (5). Even Howells acknowledges—with his nod to Twain's boyish willfulness—that he was no conventional moralist, but he was a "sage," nonetheless. As sage, Twain could occupy a place in American culture that was comfortably liminal, both conventional and avant-garde. In *Proper Mark Twain*, Krauth explores what, exactly, this title meant for in Twain's time:

The archetype of the Sage was the biblical prophet, but the Victorian Sage was more often than not a secular spokesperson, less concerned with the future than the present. Speaking with absolute assurance, with a personal certitude born of—indeed necessitated by—the collapse of traditional authorities, the Sage offers warnings about the evils of the time and wisdom about those things that are timeless. (192)

Even, or perhaps especially, in his most willful and boyish moments, Twain took on the sage's mantel. Twain confronts in his writing some of the most serious social issues of his time—racism, poverty, corruption, and other such public ills.

Twain's audience was primed to read even his darkest satire as sagacity. Naturally, there were critics who snidely suggested, from time to time, that Twain ought to just stick to light humor and let the big boys talk about the big issues, but his reputation as a moral teacher survived such reproofs, even to today. Although his one-liners and dark witticisms retain a certain niche appeal, "the cracker-barrel philosopher—observant, seasoned, obliquely irreverent" has long been regarded as "positive at heart" (Budd, "American Icon" 7). Whether he wanted it or not, Twain, as a Victorian writer, was heir to the authority of the literary dais.

Evidence indicates that he wanted it very much. Perhaps instructive writing even came naturally to him. "An orientation toward practical interests is characteristic of many born storytellers," writes Walter Benjamin. "[A story] contains, openly or covertly, something useful. . . . In every case the storyteller is a man who has counsel for his readers" (86-87). Twain may not have gravitated to the role of sage purely out of a desire to "uplift" his readers. His shift towards "serious social criticism," observes Krauth, was part of his pursuit of social status. "By assuming postures of righteousness, purity, and principle, he tapped a source of authority that strengthened an instinctive urge for dominance" (Krauth 29, 30). Either he was consciously making a mockery of the moralist-writer position by using his pulpit for petty ends or, with full respect for the power of his position, he

used it as a tool to express his particular moral code. Or perhaps it is a little bit of both. Given his knack for irony, ambiguity, and self-deprecation, Twain was fully capable of laughing at the very thing he was trying to be.

“It is more trouble to make a maxim than it is to do right,” reads the epigram to Chapter III of *Following the Equator* (440). Twain flirts openly with the paradigms of wisdom literature. What he says seems to have some wisdom in it, but his tone is so overtly humorous that we feel compelled to double-check the logic before we agree. In the front matter of the book, Twain gives this explanation of “The Pudd’nhead Maxims,” as he called his half-wise, half-facetious epigrams: “These wisdoms are for the luring of youth toward high moral attitudes. The author did not gather them from practice, but from observation. To be good is noble; but to show others how to be good is nobler and no trouble.” Twain’s claims to moral authority somehow read like a denial of the same.

Twain was a humorist playing a moralist with surprising success. When he spoke, people listened, whether he was joking or preaching. As any instructor knows, such rapt attention is priceless if one is to teach a lesson well. Krauth defines his titular “proper Mark Twain” as a “gentleman” who “honors conventions, upholds proprieties, believes in commonplaces, and even maintains the order-inducing moralities” despite his identity as a low humorist (3). But the two parts of Twain’s identity spring from the same place. Moralizing and humor both depend for success on striking a chord with common experience and popular wisdom, whether criticizing or glorifying the state of the world. But at the same time, the best

humorists and philosophers challenge the accepted worldview, compelling us “to look at the world awry” and question automatic assumptions (Critchley, “Did you hear” 45).

Twain’s clever verbal tricks and sleights of hand trouble our understanding of him both as a humorist and a moralist. Twain’s “impersonations” of conventional voices, to borrow a concept from James Cox, can sometimes be difficult to distinguish from sincere writings in the same mode. But there is always a telling contradiction buried somewhere in the text that gives the disguise away. *The Prince and the Pauper* earned the author a more respectable reputation than he had when he was “merely” a funnyman. As Tom Quirk notes, however, the exact *moral* of this seemingly moralistic story is somewhat difficult to decipher (*MTHN* 118-19).

Twain’s interminable hagiography, *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*, performs a kind of devout worship of its saintly French heroine while simultaneously being anti-Catholic and anti-French. The very institutions that Joan loves and dies for represent the height of depravity for Twain, perhaps even *because* of her innocent sacrifice to them. Although “What Is Man?” may, as Alfred Kazin asserts, embody orthodox Calvinism philosophically and scientifically, Twain manages to turn the doctrine of predestination into a heresy through these Socratic dialogues. The Young Man, who often speaks from the script of conventional morality, is left appalled by the teachings of the Old Man and his rigid fatalism. Jennifer Gurley argues that Twain “undoes his own explicit argument” in “What Is Man?” by demonstrating that the Young Man *could* resist the doctrine of the Old Man if he

learned how to think for himself (259). Twain threw himself into the roles he chose to play, but he never disappeared completely. No matter how much he wanted to be the sage, no matter how much he genuinely enjoyed the form or style he was impersonating, he was forced to contend with his own natural perversity, and he could not help but subvert sincerity with satire.

In 1906, Twain was invited to speak to the young women of Barnard College. He chose, appropriately for his impressionable and delicate audience, the topic of “Morals.” By his own account he “earnestly, imploringly, and even pathetically, inculcated them and urged them upon those masses of girls—along with illustrations—more illustrations than morals—and I never knew so grave a subject to create so much noise before” (A1 396). We can assume that his moral lessons were not the kind found in the Sunday-school room. The report from the *Barnard Bulletin* was that Twain came to the stage, apparently unprepared, and elected “Morals” as his subject on a whim: “For it is better to teach than to practice them; better to confer morals on others than to experiment too much with them on one’s self” (qtd. in *Autobiography* 608). Twain’s “illustration” was the story of a stolen watermelon that turned out to be unripe. The boy thief is incensed at the dishonesty of the grocer for selling green watermelons and returns to chastise him. “The moral, Mr. Clemens said, was that the grocer repented of his sins and soon was perched on the highest pinnacle of virtue” (608). Although, by Twain’s account, all the girls shook his hand and told him that he had inspired them to “lead a better life” (396), his joke on the institution of authors as moral teachers landed with full force.

Twain's public impersonations of the author-as-moralist were part of a larger dialogic performance that he played with traditional morality. Twain's literary performances became, in essence, a flyting contest with the established text of the sage. Flyting is a form of public dialogue evidenced in some of the world's oldest texts. Geoffrey Miller explains that the winner of a "verbal feud" in the Hebrew Bible is the party who can take insults and turn them to points of pride and distorting their enemy's boasts until they become utterly ridiculous (108). In his flyting contest with Sunday-school literature (and sometimes the Bible itself), Twain mocks the claims of virtue made by these texts, exaggerates their narratives, and claims his own "moral failings" with calculated pride. To every preachy good-little-boy tale and every stern denunciation of Twain's favorite sins, the author responds with a coy, "Yes, that is so, but . . ." ¹³ and then neatly reveals the absurdity of religion and the virtue of misbehavior. Of course, Twain's favorite technique is probably parodic exaggeration.¹⁴ In "Adam's Expulsion," Twain's narrator seems on the cusp of setting up some kind of (admittedly snarky) moral lesson:

. . . for behold, men may be made each after his kind, and Adam was of the kind which put not off until the morrow that which may be done to-day, but do even put it off until the next week, year even until the middle thereof, yet do it not then, nevertheless, but again neglect. (*BA* 113-114)

¹³ Sigmund Freud calls this kind of joke the "representation by the opposite": a kind of sly, pandering misdirection which seems to give the desired answer but the qualifies the "yes" until it becomes "no" (58).

¹⁴ Freud's "going-one-better" joke, which takes an initial statement and embroiders it for comic effect (59).

At the moment when moral instruction might begin, the text quickly descends into pseudo-Biblical babble:

Therefore, whosoever is without guile, let him lie down with the lion and the lamb and be not ashamed of his nakedness; for they shall put a ring upon his hand and shoes upon his feet; and all that was his father's shall be his, and also all that his mother and his sister hath, and likewise the mote that is in his brother's eye. (114)

Twain mocks both the flowery, archaic language of scripture and the inelegant synthesis practiced by its preachers.

Mark Twain may have been capable and willing to assume the role of sage, but his instincts as a satirist held nothing wholly sacred. By mocking the moralistic storyteller, Twain eroded his own credibility when he assumed the role of instructor. A preacher, Cox observes, urges his audience to action and moral outrage as a response to the “indignation” of sin (44). Twain, on the other hand, moves his audience to laughter. The indignation of Twain's burlesque, “moves the reader not toward guilt but toward a laughter arising from recognition of the absurdity of the world; and the laughter is not an acceptance of, or a guilt toward, but a relief *from* responsibility” (Cox 44). Viewed this way, Twain's humor is strikingly amoral.

Twain made a show of pandering to both sides of the spectrum—those seeking pure entertainment and those demanding a moral component in his writing. In the 1872 *Every Saturday* piece, “How I Escaped Being Killed in a Duel”—a semi-factual retelling of an embarrassing event in Twain's past—Twain openly discusses the farce: “The only merit I claim for the following narrative is that it is a true story. It has a moral at the end of it, but I claim nothing on that, as it is merely thrown in to

curry favor with the religious element” (543). The story is *not* strictly true, and the moral (he resolves to kill the next man who challenges him to a duel to avoid the sin of dueling) would not garner praise from any Sunday-school teacher. And yet, much as this mockery of morality seems to support Cox’s anti-serious reading, there is a moral purpose under the mockery, after all. And it lies in the pain economy.

Twain knew that he was guilty of wrongdoing in the case of the duel. The reputation earned by this and other exploits in the West very nearly ruined his chances of marrying Livy Langdon. Twain punishes himself in the story, making his character out to be little more than a lying, cowardly pest who literally cannot hit the broad side of a barn with a bullet. He urges our laughter, not to dispense with responsibility but to own up to his faults. He offers his pain for our pleasure, repaying his moral debt through the pain economy. Twain is not, perhaps, the archetypal Victorian moralist, but his particular moral code, based on a fair balance of pain and pleasure, is fundamental to his writing nonetheless.

Twain feels his way into a new morality, judging by instinct and knee-jerk emotions. Twain, Quirk says, “happened to [the truth about human nature] so variously, even recklessly, so anticlally and, at times, so irreverently, that it is more than a bit surprising he should have come to be regarded as its great interpreter” (HNB 21). Twain’s moral code is imprecise and emotional, to be sure. Even my concept of the pain economy as his moral system is a description of the moral code implied by his work rather than a precise theory that he articulated anywhere in his work.

Many academics—myself included—tend towards a liberal moral philosophy. Twain’s instincts about what is good and fair often ring true for us, but Mark Twain’s writings are rife with moral inconsistencies and outright failures. Many a reader of Twain, for instance, has had to deal with the uncomfortable realization that Huck’s honorable rebellion against slavery comes a few decades too late to the moral crisis at the center of the Civil War. During the Civil War—and long after—Twain was largely silent on the topics of slavery and racial justice. Generations of readers view *Huckleberry Finn* as Twain’s moral triumph, but we can’t forget that it was written by the same man who took up arms for a Confederate militia and who, in 1853, wrote to his mother of “the infernal abolitionists” and joked that, in New York, “I reckon I had better black my face, for in these Eastern States niggers are considerably better than white people” (“SLC to Jane Lampton Clemens”). Scholars and casual readers alike wrestle with Twain’s implicit racism. In wrapping up *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain so dramatically undervalues Jim’s suffering that he pays him off with forty dollars and a freedom already his. Twain’s morality pushes towards balance, but there is no guarantee that the scales are even. “[F]or Twain,” writes Evan Carton,

it is the joke that exposes the paradox of his identity as social critic and truth teller: that “Mark Twain” is a creation of the very institutions, ambitions, and privileges that have produced and driven the stratified, capitalist culture he rails against: most notably, slavery, the lust for wealth emblemized by the gold rush, and whiteness. (168).

Still, we somehow feel disappointed when someone who has taught us a lesson of right and wrong ends up on the wrong side. If we have learned anything from our sage, however, we know that we can't excuse his failures because we consider him "good." His actions must speak for themselves.

The Origins of Sin

The redefinition of traditional Christian morality requires that we start at the beginning: the Fall of Man. For Twain, civilization, with all its accompanying moral laws, makes "sin" possible. True innocence is indolence and an ignorant conscience. Thus, he imagined that he could watch the Fall reenacted by "uncivilized" people newly introduced to the civilized world. He remembered one such instance from his travels in the Sandwich Islands—a native Hawaiian leaving the "lazy" paradise of his home for the hard labor of the sugar plantation:

[H]e goes away to acquire *civilization*. Yes, he was naked and not ashamed; now he is clothed and knows how to be ashamed; he was unenlightened, now he has a Waterbury watch; he was unrefined, now he has jewelry, and something to make him smell good; he was a nobody, a provincial, now he has been to far countries and can show off. (*FE* 464)

Twain watches with regret as the native Hawaiian exchanges his unpretentious pleasure for the suffering of plantation life just to purchase bragging rights. But unlike his predecessors in the Garden of Eden, this man has the opportunity to walk back into Paradise. And he does. He sheds every article of civilization as fast as he

can . . . except for swearing, which, in Twain's worldview, rather improves paradise than otherwise. In his fantasy, Twain erases the Fall entirely.

The Garden of Eden is the first and most influential morality tale of the Judeo-Christian tradition. It is the root of guilt and innocence, sin and retribution. Twain knew it well and found it problematic. How could Adam and Eve do wrong if they did not know what wrong was? The lasting effect of Eden—the “Moral Sense”—was highly praised by preachers and moral philosophers, but it did not seem to keep people from falling afoul of their vengeful God. The one moment when a conscience might have been helpful—when Adam and Eve must choose between eternal life and a pain-ridden mortality—they had not yet been provided with one. The ignorance of the primal pair, Twain believed, was their chief defense. That fateful threat in Genesis 2:17, “[B]ut of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat: for in the day that you eat of it you shall die,” meant nothing to them. “Good,” “evil,” “die”—how could they know what these words meant? They did not choose their ignorance, therefore they did not deserve their punishment. God knowingly deprived them of the knowledge necessary to avoid death, so the guilt is rightly his. Now that the damage had been done, Twain resented his overzealous conscience, dogging him for all his sins, whether real and imagined. If God was willing to claim responsibility for this ridiculous Moral Sense—the great enemy of inner peace—Twain wasn't about to let him off the hook for it.

Twain returned to Eden time and time again, writing criticisms of the Biblical version of events and providing his own account of the Genesis story.¹⁵ Because Twain's morality is so tightly bound to the pain economy, he worked to develop a pain narrative for Adam and Eve. Sometimes, Twain's paradise is pain free. "Pain is not of your world," says Satan, struggling to explain the concept to Adam and Eve; "pain is impossible to you, you have never experienced a physical pain" (BA 64). They are as ignorant of pain as they are of sin, and God's threats fall upon uncomprehending ears. Even death, pain's culmination, means nothing to them, though Twain hedges on whether it will be a curse or a blessing to humanity. Eve thinks that it is nothing more than a very long sleep, and exclaims how wonderful it must be. "Poor child," thinks Satan, "some day you may know what a pathetic truth you have spoken; some day you may say, out of a broken heart, 'Come to me, oh, Death, the compassionate! steep me in thy merciful oblivion, oh refuge of the sorrowful, friend of the forsaken and the desolate!'" (65).

Of course, Twain's revisions of Eden do sometimes allow pain into the Garden. He could hardly conceive of the human creature without some kind of suffering. In the "Autobiography of Eve," Eden has no pain except love pains, which are ultimately exchanged for equal pleasures. Eve's first sorrow is her loneliness, which she astutely notes is an unearned pain. "[A]ll the other creatures have mates, I

¹⁵ Twain began retelling the Genesis story in 1866, turning to Eden specifically by 1877. His last completed rewriting of Adam and Eve's story appeared in 1905. See Baetzholt and McCullough's excellent *The Bible According to Mark Twain* (1995) for a comprehensive explanation of Twain's relationship to the Biblical narrative as well as a useful collection of his Edenic writings.

have none. I am the only one that is alone. . . . This cannot be natural; surely this was not intended. For, what have I done? I have done nothing. I have not deserved this sorrow, this shame, this embarrassment" (*BA* 42-43). Knowing that her fate is to be mated, we can smile and enjoy her longing sighs. Even when she finds Adam, however, her pain is not over. Suffering rejection at his hands sends her to a new level of agony. "I had never been treated so before; the animals always gave me love for love, and never thought to hurt my body or shame my pride" (50). Twain's humanity always had the capacity to sin, to cause another pain when only love was offered. Ignorant of God's definitions of right and wrong, Eve nonetheless senses that Adam wrongs her by giving her pain in exchange for the pleasure she offers him in her love. For Twain, *this* is the definition of sin.

Placing all of his moral apples in the pain basket, Twain must now reframe the traditional story of Adam and Eve's disobedience. Twain carries his defense beyond their sympathetic ignorance. In Twain's tales, Eve desires the forbidden fruit not out of perversity but out of love—she wants to give Adam a gift. She shrugs off the prospect of her own pain as an acceptable cost: ". . . so I come to harm through pleasing him, why shall I care for that harm?" (*BA* 24). Her resolve to violate God's law in favor of the law of her heart is no sin. Rather, it is one of her greatest virtues. Adam, too, shows this same quality of virtue. When, upon eating the fruit, Eve transforms from a blooming young beauty to an old woman, ashamed and naked, Adam does not abandon her. Seeing and understanding, he "loyally and bravely" takes up the apple and eats as well (67). He makes the choice to "sin" despite

concrete evidence of what pain looks like. Out of love, he joins her in her newfound suffering. His response shows him to be worthy of his partner and better than his god.

Even though Twain reimagines sin for his original pair, he does not try to rewrite their suffering. The price of the Fall remains, but Twain discusses it in the language of the pain economy. In a “Passage from Eve’s Diary,” the great mother of humanity speaks of her pain in strikingly economic terms:

We were ignorant then, we are rich in learning, now—ah, how rich! We know hunger, thirst and cold; we know pain, disease and grief; we know hate, rebellion and deceit; we know remorse, the conscience that persecutes guilt and innocence alike, making no distinction; we know weariness of body and spirit, the unrefreshing sleep, the rest which rests not, the dreams which restore Eden, and banish it again with the waking; we know misery, we know torture, and the heartbreak; we know humiliation and insult; we know indecency, immodesty, and the soiled mind; we know the scorn that attaches to the transmitted image of God exposed unclothed to the day; we know fear; we know vanity, folly, envy, hypocrisy; we know irreverence, we know blasphemy; we know Right from Wrong, and how to avoid the one and do the other; we know all the rich produce of the Moral Sense, and it is our possession. Would we could sell it for one hour of Eden and white purity, would we could degrade the animals with it! (68)

Her suffering pours out almost entirely in one exceptionally long, breathless sentence. After their dealings with God—the Moral Sense in trade for Eden—Adam and Eve have accumulated a wealth in the pain economy that they can never fully deplete, no matter their future “transgressions.”

The celebration of the Moral Sense grated on Twain’s nerves. “The Church still prizes the Moral Sense,” writes Satan in “Letters from the Earth,” “as man’s

noblest asset today, although the Church knows God had a distinctly poor opinion of it and did what he could in his clumsy way to keep his happy Children of the Garden from acquiring it” (Twain 230). But we were poorly designed. Our natural inclination is to desire what is forbidden. Given the choice between ignorant innocence and the excruciating awareness of our sinfulness, we inevitably choose the pain. The Moral Sense, which we are categorically unable to refuse, ropes us into God’s laws of righteousness and iniquity. We would be better off without it, Twain argues:

Because it is a degradation, a disaster. Without it one *cannot* do wrong; with it, one can. Therefore it has but one office, only one—to teach how to do wrong. It can teach no other thing—no other thing whatever. It is the *creator* of wrong; wrong cannot exist until the Moral Sense brings it into being. (*BA* 66)

This knowledge that cannot be unknown binds us to an abiding sense of guilt. Unlike the simple exchanges of pain and pleasure between Adam and Eve in the Garden, this hurt is irreparable. It is the single greatest imbalance recorded in the pain economy.

Twain’s quarrel is first with God, but he holds humanity accountable for its own part in the pain caused by traditional morality. Whereas the Moral Sense is the curse of God on all humankind, morals themselves “are an acquirement” (Twain, *Autobiography* 660). As Twain saw it, the propensity to lie, cheat, nurture, or sacrifice is determined, on the one hand, by the distribution of a person’s “moral qualities” and, on the other, by that person’s responsiveness to social influences. The very qualities that people are prone to tout as the hallmarks of civilization—

“independence” of thought and action, religious and political tolerance, the idea that we “are glad when other men succeed” and are “sorry to see them fall again”—these, Twain calls “sweet smelling sugar-coated lies” (“Character” 854-55). The lie that God implanted—the Moral Sense—is codified and perpetuated by human beings themselves. We tell each other to follow these ideals, and we punish those who publicly fail to do so, but no one really can be independent, tolerant, or truly altruistic.

Twain’s view of man-as-machine troubles the assertion of free will, but it doesn’t excuse humankind for enforcing unfair moral standards. Even as the Old Man teaches that a man, like an engine, can claim no “personal merit” for its actions because “it can’t *help* doing them” (WM 732), even as Jerry proclaims from his woodpile that “a man is not independent, and cannot afford views which might interfere with his bread and butter” (“Corn-Pone” 507), even as Twain declares it pointless for a person to “grieve over a thing which by the eternal law of his make he cannot help” (“My First Lie” 440), the author drops hints that we might learn to work the machine however we like.

On the surface, it seems as if Twain despairs of true virtue. Our Moral Sense is just an arbitrary and misguided function of our inborn natures. “Authentic morality becomes impossible because, in Twain’s view, the conscience is trained by environment and external circumstances that plunge us into an existential anguish of guilt” (Brodwin 224). Twain contends that all human behavior springs from the effort to achieve self-approval and external approval (which are interrelated).

Wherever these prizes lie, there we are trained to go. Even a person's morality is subject to this kind of training. "There is nothing that training cannot do," writes Twain. "Nothing is above its reach or below it. It can turn bad morals to good, good morals to bad; it can destroy principles, it can re-create them; it can debase angels to men and lift men to angelship" ("As Regards" 477). All that we are is shaped by these training forces. The creation of the individual, says Foucault, "is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise" (188). The machinery of man, morality and all, disappears completely into its creator and becomes an extension of that power. "If character is fate," writes Cowan, "then whatever we are is fatal; it carries us to our deaths" (115).

But who originates that power? Is it always and only God? In his 1879 *Galaxy* article, "Disgraceful Persecution of a Boy," Twain places the culpability for the awful effects of poor training onto the shoulders of society at large. Twain cunningly defends a boy who has been arrested for stoning a Chinese man by asking, "What had the child's education been?" (379). Given that he comes from an upper class Christian family, Twain can only assume that his parents had "just enough natural villainy in their compositions to make them yearn after the daily papers, and enjoy them" (379). As a result, they learned that Chinese immigrants were lower than whites, that they could be abused freely, and that any white person who abuses a Chinese person will be defended by the law, not punished by it. Naturally, they would communicate this to their son. Thus, he is not responsible for his cruel actions.

It is a problematic conclusion for many reasons. As indicated by the title of the piece, Twain's main purpose is to chastise those who intend to punish a child for actions that he had every right to believe were socially acceptable. Yet most readers will agree that a boy ought *not* be allowed to stone another person on his way to church. The pain suffered by the Chinese man is obviously unjustified and in need of repayment. Who is responsible for the debt? Twain indicates the parents and the "natural villainy" demonstrated by their love of the daily papers. This, of course, spreads the blame to himself—a newspaperman—and his readers, who very likely enjoy a daily paper as much as their monthly issue of the *Galaxy*. The reporters merely record the events as they happen, however, and the readers merely receive. It is the police who abuse the immigrants. Or, perhaps, the State laws are unjust. Twain, of course, lets suspicion sit on all alike. Any and all gestures of virtuous self-defense are, in the end, rather incriminating:

Keeping in mind the tuition in the humanities which the entire "Pacific coast" gives its youth, there is a very sublimity of grotesqueness in the virtuous flourish with which the good city fathers of San Francisco proclaim (as they have lately done) that "The police are positively ordered to arrest all boys, of every description and wherever found, who engage in assaulting Chinamen." ("Disgraceful" 381)

Children are easy targets and unprepared to interpret the mixed messages of social morality. When we punish a child for the misbehavior learned from us, our publications, or implicit permissions, we are adding their pain to our moral debt. Somewhere along the line, we have become responsible for those all-powerful external influences.

The Young Man may be mistaken that the Old Man's determinism "not only degrades [a man] to a machine, but allows him no control over the machine" (800). Paradoxically, the doctrine of man-as-machine forms the foundation of moral responsibility. Understanding one's own machinery, one possesses the key to self-control. The Old Man provides this time-honored method for self-improvement: "Diligently train your ideals *upward* and *still upward* toward a summit where you will find your chiefest pleasure in conduct which, while contenting you, will be sure to confer benefits upon your neighbor and community" (767). The Old Man notes that his philosophy is unique only in that, rather than trying to "bribe" the self with future rewards for good behavior, it acknowledges that the self always and inevitably comes first. In the moment when he seems to overly privilege the ego and surrender to it, Twain reduces it to a controllable machine, a tool to reach moral equilibrium *in spite of* the powers of social training.

Twain's paradoxical offer of self-determination, his mechanical man, forces us to decide if we want to be seen that way, using our mechanical nature as an excuse for all our bad behavior, or if we would rather accept the full and terrible responsibility for our depravity. When teaching a course on Twain and Religion, I brought this question to the class:¹⁶ Is Twain giving us an easy way out of any moral guilt, or does he move us to accept moral responsibility? The class responded with ardent declarations that Twain's intention was to force us to decide whether or not

¹⁶ It may be pertinent to note that all class participants were age 50 and over. I have not had the opportunity to compare their responses with those of undergraduate students. It would be a worthwhile experiment, I think.

we would lead moral lives and that he wanted us to believe in right and wrong and personal responsibility. Since he was offering the choice, I asked, which would you choose? They almost unanimously elected to own their morality and brave whatever damnation or salvation might be due them. To return to paradise, as the native Hawaiian does in *Following the Equator*, we must shed not only the burdensome Moral Sense but civilization itself. But who is really willing to do that?

The Power of Submission

Here, we reach an important point. Twain may have fantasized about a return to paradise, but he did not attempt it. He, like everyone else, had been trained by his surroundings to recognize right and wrong, to pretend to independence of mind and being, and to seek approval. The pain economy sees its highest trade in a fallen world—one with injury and imbalance in need of restitution. Ultimately, Twain's critique of traditional Christian morality is not a nihilistic deconstruction of morality itself. If every human action is generated in response to external pressure, then that pressure is essential for achieving anything. Twain used the pain economy to judge the pain and payoff offered by social and religious standards of behavior, but he did not negate the rules themselves. In fact, he needed them.

Twain's criticism of conventional morality is bound to his submission to it. Submission to a dominant power is, for the masochist bottom, a form of resistance and criticism. Gilles Deleuze writes, "The element of contempt in the submission of the masochist has often been emphasized: this apparent obedience conceals a

criticism and a provocation" (88). The masochist's pain and humiliation are projections of the will of the oppressor. Once the will of the submissive is subjugated, all action—pleasant or painful—springs from the ego of the sadist. Did Twain position himself as the victim of sadistic Christian religious thought?

In many ways, he did. The man-as-machine line of thought proclaims the erasure of free will. Frequently, Twain's God plays the perfect sadist. Gregg Camfield includes a passage from Twain's writings¹⁷ in which he recounts a rather chilling scene that he has been dreaming recently. At first, he sees something only vaguely, but it begins to clarify. "It is the Deity's mouth—His open mouth—laughing at the human race!" (502). The mouth is gigantic, wrapped around the horizon, encompassing the galaxy. The laughter, when it comes, crashes with thunder and lightning. "Every night he laughs, and every morning I eagerly search the paper to see what it is He has been laughing at," writes Twain. Inevitably, he finds the source of God's amusement in the headlines: some story that serves to embarrass the human race for its "pitiful and pathetic" actions. On the morning of the writing, Twain finds this headline: "SPECIAL TRAIN TO SAVE HER DOG'S LIFE. Rich, Childless Woman Spent Thousands in Vain Efforts for Her Pet." He finds, in the story, more sadness than humor; God's laughter feels insulting. "No matter what the source of a sorrow may be, the sorrow itself is respectable," Twain preaches. This God is responsible for all human suffering unilaterally. We are passive machines, never given the option of anything but submission.

¹⁷ Camfield dates the passage, found in the *Mark Twain Papers*, October 10, 1907.

As we have seen, however, Twain still hints at the opportunity to escape from submission into self-determination. Through the pain economy, he maintains a masochistic identity, but he is eager to expose and undercut the sadistic powers by suffering under them.¹⁸ Stanley Brodwin writes of Twain as a “countertheologian,” breaking down the image of a compassionate Providence by comparing Christian ideology to the reality that the innocent suffer and the sinful prosper: “Providence is then exposed as a sadistic law, if it exists at all, or as another form of false consciousness deluding the believer” (238). Twain is ready to reclaim control over his own pain. Foucault observes that maintaining power over the “body of the condemned” is a constant battle; the punisher must continually maneuver to maintain power (174). Spotting a weakness in his oppressor, Twain turns his suffering into capital which he can spend as he chooses.

Practically speaking, however, there was little direct conflict between Twain and social strictures in his daily life in Hartford. Andrews writes that the Hartford community often “deferred to Mark Twain rather than require him to conform to its prejudice. Most of the time, therefore, he was not galled by the mores of this society. They sometimes amused him, but they never confined him against his will” (108). He could defy traditional beliefs as he saw fit. Twain often allowed Biblical passages a kind of implied moral authority, but he was also quick to point out the book’s

¹⁸ The practice of sadism and masochism manifest along a complex spectrum. At one end are the extreme sadists that appear in the Marquis de Sade’s writing, for whom the wellbeing of the bottom is of little or no concern. At the other end are masochists who largely direct the actions of their tops, designing their own pain with total control. Twain’s use of the pain economy, I believe, moves him from agentless victim to empowered masochist.

grotesque, violent, and contradictory qualities. He was eager to condemn those he considered “bad” Christians, but he also sincerely admired and praised people who acted in the world as “good” Christians. Raised by a Presbyterian mother, Twain never considered himself anything else. “Twain’s work always involves Calvinist orthodoxy,” writes Joe B. Fulton, “often questioning it, occasionally reinforcing it, and sometimes invoking it in reactionary and chauvinistic ways” (16). So was his irritation with traditional moral restrictions mere petulance? Did he have any rightful claim to the pain he ascribed to God’s morality?

We have a choice. We can read Twain’s apparent orthodoxies as complicity with traditional morality, or we can read them (at least in part) as parodies. Humor, says Deleuze, mocks the law via excessive application: “By scrupulously applying the law we are able to demonstrate its absurdity and provoke the very disorder that it is intended to prevent or conjure” (88). What looks like conscientious adherence may very well be rebellion in a thin disguise.

Just so, we find Twain mouthing the doctrines of Providence with the intention of disruption. He pushed the idea of an all-powerful and loving God to its most absurd conclusion with his parodies of Providence. Twain’s burlesques of the “Providence Tales,” some of which we have already begun to examine, represent skepticism regarding over-simplistic theology that was widely held at the time (Fulton 44). Fulton argues that Twain did not necessarily disagree that God was in control, but that he put into question whether it was really a good idea. For Twain, Providence came with baggage: “a trinity of violence, sovereignty, and mystery”

(Fulton 61). Rather than quell fears, Twain's Providence represents yet one more thing to be afraid of.

Susan K. Harris reasons that part of Twain's frustration with teachings of Divine Providence was that, through this belief, people were shirking their moral responsibility as active participants in the world and "substituting rote rules for original, and courageous, moral actions" ("Christian Mission" 44). Much as Twain's theology (such as it is) paints a damning portrait of humanity, he urged his readers on towards a new righteousness, one not modeled on the inscrutable and dangerous deity of the pulpit and Sunday-school literature. Twain calls for a righteousness that is based on personal responsibility and fairness, not God's volatile will. When Little Bessie asks her mother why there is suffering in the world, she receives this pat answer: "It is for our good, my child. In His wisdom and mercy the Lord sends us these afflictions to discipline us and make us better" ("Little Bessie" 864). Yet the mother's examples of God's justice show one person suffering for the crime of another, a sinner dying without the opportunity to reform, and the doer of good acts punished. Twain's accusations are mathematical: "He is always punishing—punishing trifling misdeeds with thousandfold severity" (RR 332). Twain increases the offense to "ten-thousand fold" and "ten-billionfold." Twain measures carefully, never doubting that God could stop hurting human beings if he wanted to. But he doesn't want to, because—despite his relentless tormenting—God is worshipped by his victims. In the pain economy, his debts are astronomical.

Just as the individuals gain control over the machine of their being by understanding their own construction, so victims gain power by exposing the instrument of their subjugation. Any kind of transparency, let alone control, is a disruption to the mechanism of discipline. “Disciplinary power is exercised through its invisibility; at the same time it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility” (Foucault 199). Twain turns this model on its head, bringing the punishers into the light of scrutiny and rewriting the law to supply a balanced justice, not a heavy-handed discipline. He does not dispute the fact that God, church, and society hold the power to assign guilt and punish accordingly. Their actions are his best argument for change.

The evidence speaks for itself. “Strange . . . that you should not have suspected that your universe and its contents were only dreams, visions, fictions! Strange, because they are so frankly and hysterically insane—like all dreams,” 44 tells his friend in the famed final chapter of *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger* (*Mysterious Stranger* 404). Dreams though they may be, the berserk laws of God’s universe—because they are enforced—become our reality. “[P]ower produces; it produces reality,” writes Foucault (204-05). Singled out by discipline, the individual is created through the process of subjugation to power. The presence of a moral law divides the world into ‘good’ and ‘bad,’ and anyone who falls under punishment of the moral law is therefore bad. Deleuze discusses how the connection between law and morality creates a sense of depravity: “If men knew what the Good was, or knew how to conform to it, they would not need laws: the law is only a representative of

the Good in a world that the Good has more or less forsaken" (81). When our definitions of 'good' and 'bad' are based on the law, however, there is no way to evaluate the law itself.

Twain's masochistic participation in the pain economy becomes a form of censure of the dominant power. By submitting to the laws and the punishments of God and society, Twain allows the scenes of injustice to play out. But by measuring pain objectively, Twain privileges his simple calculations over the defining labels of "good," "bad," "criminal," and "saint." Anyone and anything can be evaluated in this way, even the great, unassailable forces of the universe:

a God who could make good children as easily as bad, yet preferred to make bad ones; who could have made every one of them happy, yet never made a single happy one; who made them prize their bitter life, yet stingily cut it short; who gave his angels eternal happiness unearned, yet required his other children to earn it; who gave his angels painless lives, yet cursed his other children with biting miseries and maladies of mind and body; who mouths justice, and invented hell—mouths mercy, and invented hell—mouths Golden Rules, and forgiveness multiplied by seventy times seven, and invented hell; who mouths morals to other people, and has none himself; who frowns upon crimes, yet commits them all; who created man without invitation, then tries to shuffle the responsibility for man's acts upon man, instead of honorably placing it where it belongs, upon himself; and finally, with altogether divine obtuseness, invites this poor abused slave to worship him! (*Mysterious Stranger* 404-05)

Twain is not interested in proving that God does or does not exist—the guilt and the pain caused by his religion is real enough. Similarly, Twain does not advocate for revolution, in spite of the sins of his government. Nor did he go beyond minor

affronts to social standards of propriety. A masochist requires the scenes of power imbalance and painful persecution to perform his act of meaning making.

In fact, Twain's view of human nature increases the limits on the human creature's freedom. He writes a kind of external constraint into our very being. Twain firmly believed that almost nothing originates in an individual person; their opinions, temperament, and impulses are almost entirely determined either by nature or society. Twain barely allows the possibility that a person might dictate his or her own fate. "[T]he quality of independence was almost wholly left out of the human race. The scattering exceptions to the rule only emphasize it, light it up, make it glare" ("Character of Man" 855). The Old Man of "What Is Man?" attests, "There are gold men, and tin men, and copper men, and leaden men, and steel men, and so on—and each has the limitations of his nature, his heredities, his training and his environment" (733). Similarly, Twain offers sympathy to the person in dire life circumstances. "I find that principles have no real force," he writes in Adam's voice, "except when one is well fed" (*BA* 11-12). His sin is negated by his need. The conditions of a person's character or life are neither noble nor depraved. A man may suffer and he may cause suffering for any reason, but as long as these are in balance, he is not at fault.

Twain was no holier-than-thou reformer. He was candid about his faults. Like anyone, Twain sometimes made personal gains in public opinion and wealth at the cost of embarrassment (or worse) to others. In his essay, "Nevada Influences on Mark Twain," Laurence Berkove gives an example of one such moment. As a young

newspaperman, Twain came to admire and praise an anti-corruption journalist by the name of Conrad Wiegand. But when Wiegand fell into general disfavor with the newspapers of the West for refusing to engage physically with his enemies, Twain recanted his praise and printed criticism of Wiegand instead. Twain's censure of Wiegand was even added as an appendix to *Roughing It*. "Twain acted shamefully," writes Berkove (162). When his own reputation had been on the line, his boss at the *Enterprise*, Joe Goodman, had defended the young writer's decision to attack corruption. Berkove acknowledges that it would take years for Twain to mend his ways: "Much later in his career, Twain would be more like Goodman—fearlessly outspoken in defense of his principles—but while he was establishing his career he admired Goodman but still lacked his strength of character" (162). It would not be the last time, however, that Twain made choices that furthered his own success at the expense of others.

Twain's imbalance, like everyone else's, is revealed by the calculations of the pain economy. Within the text, Twain could choose whether or not he would consider his own sins. Whatever the case, his writing calculates the pain of the world around him and, at times, attempts to set the balance back in order. As author, Twain could control how people were repaid for the pain they caused others. All events, whether intended as acts of justice or not, were available to him as tools for implementing balance: "From *every* impulse, whether good or evil, flows two streams; the one carries health, the other carries poison" ("Dervish" 547). Only time will tell which is needed.

Twain's humor owes much to the pain economy and vice versa. Both are interested in the transformation of injury into pleasure and resetting the balance on the pain account. Humor is also a means of resetting our normal perception of the world. Critchley writes, "Jokes are forms of abstraction that place in abeyance our usual modes of reaction, whether veridical or moral: if someone falls on a banana skin, then we do not rush to help, we sit back and laugh; if a horse talks, then we do not express disbelief, but delight" (*On Humour* 87). The work of the humorist is to disrupt the routine so that we can recognize the contradictions and absurdities of our everyday world. It is only natural, then, that Twain—a humorist by deepest instinct—could so deftly cut through the façade of conventionality and challenge the underlying assumptions of morality. In his "Advice to Youth," Twain juxtaposes the language of temperance and morality with the violent fantasies of revenge that boil under the surface of such outward restraint: "If a person offend you, and you are in doubt as to whether it was intentional or not, do not resort to extreme measures; simply watch your chance and hit him with a brick" (801). The joke hints that the only reason we need the language of temperance is because we are motivated by unwieldy passions. Twain coyly nudges at the "uncivilized" desire to get even with one's enemies, whatever the moral implications. Whatever sympathy we, as readers, might feel with this decisive response falls into direct conflict with the sense of wisdom that we ascribe to the first part of the "advice." Once again, Twain is not really prescribing action; his humor—and the pain economy—are designed primarily to expose.

I have been arguing that Mark Twain was *not* a reformer, that the pain economy is simply descriptive, not prescriptive, but I have to consider the possibility that there was a part of him that wanted to effect real change. Perhaps Twain's sometime dream of being a preacher¹⁹ planted in him the seed of the reformer. Furthermore, as Simon Critchley observes, humor can itself be a tool of reform: "The critical task of humour . . . would not be sheer malice or jibing, but the lashing of vices which are general and not personal" (*On Humour* 15). Humor, says Critchley, targets correctable flaws in the world and works to effect their correction. It implies a rather noble goal. We may wonder, then, whether Twain viewed his own humor in these lofty terms. Twain wrote for the lower classes, notes Krauth, and got energy and power out of his superiority; he viewed his work as a means of helping lower people advance socially (15-16). Krauth's depiction of Twain may paint the author as snobbish and condescending, but it also indicates that he had a certain sense of himself and his work which combined the efforts of humor and moralism. The moral law that he employed in his writing—the pain economy—was his gift to those suffering under the broken morality of law and religion.

If there is any active goal in Twain's writing, it is the devaluation of the terms of traditional morality. Twain's humor "draws its readers into complicity with its violations" (Krauth 172), making us all iconoclasts, blasphemers, and renegades. But then, in one deft movement, Twain takes away the power of those labels. In the pain

¹⁹ A young Sam Clemens wrote to his brother and sister-in-law in 1865: "I never had but two powerful ambitions in my life. One was to be a pilot, & the other a preacher of the gospel" ("SLC to Orion"). Finding himself without the requisite religious faith for the ministry, he resigned himself to his other, lower calling—humor writing.

economy, any action can be good or evil. Twain's affection for certain sins—lying, for instance—forces his readers to consider what a “good” sin looks like. If a lie is told well, it gives pleasure to the listener; it is a true gift. More than that, a lie might almost be a holy act. In his humorous piece “My First Lie and How I Got Out of It,” Twain suggests that angels, if they spent more time on Earth, would naturally come to tell generous and virtuous lies. Of course, lying is not, in and of itself, a virtuous act. As with any act, it can be used to inflict pain or provide pleasure, and that alone is the measure of its worth.

A quick comparison of two of Twain's liars shows the distinction clearly. In *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*, the Paladin is a blustering liar, devoted to a ceaseless and shameless game of one-upmanship. But his exaggerations and his tall tales are a source of entertainment for his compatriots rather than an injury to them. People love to indulge the Paladin in his lies because they are purely guileless. “[T]his charm lay in the Paladin's sincerity. He was not lying consciously; he believed what he was saying” (658). His self-blindness makes him a bit of a laughingstock, but the Paladin's innocence and harmlessness (as well as the fact that he is a source of amusement for others) count greatly to his credit.

On the other hand we have Senator Abner Dilworthy of *The Gilded Age*. Although Charles Dudley Warner first introduces us to Dilworthy, Twain develops him beyond a condescending politician into a villainous and self-serving thief. Through calculated performances of piety, Senator Dilworthy's exploits the credulity of his constituents, playing politics for his own personal gain. “The great

public is weak-minded,” sneers this supposed public servant (316). His offense is compounded because it is committed under the guise of sincerity and morality. Dilworthy’s lies alone do not amount to moral failing; if he believed his own lies, he would merely be a fool, like the Paladin; if he lied to benefit others, he would be a hero. It is the intentional profit at the expense of others that Twain denounces.

Like our temperament or our life circumstances, our propensity to sin is something that we cannot choose, as humans. In his speech, “On the Decay of the Art of Lying,” Twain declares, “Everybody lies—every day; every hour; awake; asleep; in his dreams; in his joy; in his mourning; if he keeps his tongue still, his hands, his feet, his eyes, his attitude, will convey deception—and purposely” (825). This is not a condemnation but a revelation. With this knowledge, we can turn our energy away from trying to avoid a thing that comes as naturally to us as breathing and learn to do it correctly—morally. We can find out a moral lie with a few simple questions: “Is it justifiable? Most certainly. It is beautiful, it is noble; for its object is, *not* to reap profit, but to convey a pleasure?” (“On the Decay” 825). In the reverse, truth is not objectively good. One can use truth maliciously. “An injurious truth has no merit over an injurious lie. Neither should ever be uttered,” Twain declares (826). Having been created with the ability—moreover, the compulsion—to lie, it cannot be a sin to do so, though it could be if used to injure and not to help. The rules are simple: “Therefore, the wise thing is for us diligently to train ourselves to lie thoughtfully, judiciously; to lie with a good object, and not an evil one; to lie for others’ advantage, and not our own; to lie healingly, charitably, humanely, not cruelly, hurtfully,

maliciously” (828-829). The pain economy has the power not only to transform pain into pleasure but sin into virtue, as well.

Twain’s reform, if we are to call it that, demands that we measure each person and each action of each person by the pain economy to determine its worth. Twain is notoriously fond of his scallywags—Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer, Stephan of *Life on the Mississippi*, Little Satan/No. 44, and any number of other bad little boys and girls. By traditional standards, these are sinners—they lie, cheat, steal, and fight. But they do these things in good measure, taking their lumps as good as they give them. What matters is not that the scallywag, like Tom Blakenship (Huck’s real-life model), is “ignorant, unwashed, insufficiently fed,” but that he has “as good a heart as ever any boy had” (41 397). Dreaded by mothers for his sins, Tom Blakenship was nevertheless irreproachable by Twain’s moral judgment. Similarly, Tom Sawyer, though he is a conventionally naughty child, “converts all serious projects in the town to pleasure and at the same time subverts all the adult rituals by revealing that actually they are nothing but dull play to begin with” (Cox 140-41). Like Twain, Tom makes successful transactions in the pain economy. Unworried by the rules of church or law, he invests in profitable pain for the end goal of pleasure. Cox concludes his reflections on Tom with this significant distinction: “The child of the romantic poet has a direct relationship to God and Nature. Mark Twain’s boy has a direct relationship to pleasure” (148). I, of course, would add that a relationship with pleasure, for Twain, is also a relationship with pain.

So the goal of the pain economy is a pain-pleasure balance—but what happens when it is out of balance? In the next two chapters, I will discuss the extremes of imbalance in the pain economy. Imbalance in pain often reflects an imbalance of power. Exploring power disparity is the single most important activity for the masochist, says Staci Newmahr (74). The same can be said of humor. “What we see, when we really look,” writes William Keough, “is that our jokes are often double-edged swords, signs and signals of complicated relationships and power struggles” (xv). In proper form, Twain, humorist and masochist, demonstrates a heightened sensitivity to power relationships. Ultimately, he cannot resist being drawn into the imbalance and finding creative energy in navigating the commerce between pain and pleasure, the powerful and the weak. He reaches with his criticisms, again and again, at those who have the power to reduce pain and squander it. The pain economy is unforgiving to those who spend and waste pain not their own. The rich man who kills seventy-two buffalo only to eat a part of one finds himself the moral inferior to a snake, who stops killing when satiated (Twain, “Man’s Place” 208). The poor and oppressed of Twain’s texts, on the other hand, who have “had an unfair show in the battle of life” learn that it is “no sin to take military advantage of the enemy” (*Pudd’nhead* 15).

The pleasure of the privileged can also be used as a tool for aggression in the pain economy. Arrogant displays of pleasure emphasize the imbalance between the boaster and their suffering neighbors. The ability to keep one’s pleasure private in deference to another’s pain, wrote Twain, was an act listed among the “fine and

heroic”: “There are people who can do all fine and heroic things but one! keep from telling their happiness to the unhappy” (*FE* 574). The moral failing is not in having pleasure when others are in pain but increasing your pleasure as a result of the inequity. The boaster indebts himself to his hurting neighbors by extracting additional pleasure from their pain.

The two ideas are bound together, integral components of a balanced economy. Pleasure cannot exist without a counterpoint of pain. Unearned pleasure is an indicator that someone—a neighbor, a politician, or deity—is at fault. To dispense with pain for pleasure alone may be bliss, but it is a reckless bliss, as we see in “Carnival of Crime.” On the surface, pure pleasure—all innocence and no guilt—is attractive. Bataille writes, “Innocence . . . is an abstract idea, the absence of guilt can’t be negative: it is *glory*” (87). But as Twain shows us, that glory is limited to one individual, and it is highly dangerous. The narrator of that story falls into a kind of blanket innocence of conscience, but the damage he wreaks on his community is profound. The insistent balance of the pain economy protects us all.

Conclusion

Twain gravitated towards the pain economy because it gave him a meaningful way of engaging the larger problem of his own innate guilt. In part, the pain economy provided “a justifying explanation for the terrible thing he inwardly knew he was” (Robinson, “Innocent” 454)—he had profited at another’s expense and needed to suffer. The flagellations of his conscience provided some of the

appropriate pain. But sometimes his conscience—or the rules of his religion or society—caused him to suffer arbitrarily. At those times, Twain could count his pain as credit in the pain economy. Unable to avoid the fact of his own guilt, pain, and pleasure, Twain found a means to process his pain.

Twain's most successful investment was not in the stock market or an invention but in the pain economy. He may not have consciously drawn a parallel between morality, pain, and the language of economics, but as Cox notes, "Mark Twain was himself an embodiment of the twin activities of investment and invention, and the remarkably intimate relationship between the two makes it possible to define his genius as essentially speculation" (185). The pain economy reflects this quality in Twain, and the language of economics figures prominently when he addresses the issues of morality. Describing one of the unfortunate heroes of his mock-morality tales, Twain writes, "Whatever this boy did, he got into trouble. The very things the boys in the books got rewarded for turned out to be about the most unprofitable things he could invest in" ("Good Little Boy" 376). Teased, beaten, and nearly drowned for his efforts, what does this boy "invest" except his pain? The problem is, he is still stuck in the false exchange of righteousness and sin. He inserts himself into other people's pains, seeking praise, and receives bitterness instead. In the end, he is literally exploded for his failure to move out of the old sin economy into the new pain economy. Twain valued pain too much to let it go uncounted.

Measuring guilt, innocence, and punishment in concrete numbers is not unique to Twain. Foucault highlights "an economico-moral self-evidence of a

penalty that metes out punishments in days, months, and years and draws up quantitative equivalences between offenses and durations” (215-16). It is the “political economy” of the body, says Foucault (172). It is no coincidence, he says, that we talk about a person “paying one’s debt” to society. Transgression and retribution are, in the legal system, quantifiable and manageable. Twain’s sense of morality resonates, in some ways, with the simplicity of legal punishment. The difference, of course, is in how Twain defines transgression.

Although Twain’s sympathy lies with the sufferer, his practical advice is to invest on both sides of the pain economy—to live as both pleasure-seeker and sufferer. Such a person is an active participant in the world, engaged, alive. Moreover, it is a hedge against disaster. In the opening chapter of *Following the Equator*, the narrator places himself in debt to his own body—his habits of smoking cigars and drinking both coffee and scotch to excess obviously harming his health. When he falls sick, he can restore balance in his body by sacrificing these harmful pleasures. It works brilliantly, and he is back on his feet in no time. But the woman with no vices to give up is doomed. “She was a sinking vessel, with no freight in her to throw overboard and lighten the ship withal. Why, even one or two little bad habits could have saved her, but she was just a moral pauper” (428). Her pain has not come from the exchange of pleasure. She is wholly victim and unable to bargain.

On the flip side, suffering can be stored up and traded in for some benefit later. Twain knew the system well:

In my early manhood, and in middle-life, I used to vex myself with reforms, every now and then. And I never had occasion to regret these

divergencies, for whether the resulting deprivations were long or short, the rewarding pleasure which I got out of the vice when I returned to it, always paid me for all that it cost" (A1 355).

An efficient pain broker, he was determined to waste neither pain nor payoff. Twain had plenty of evidence that he was not the only one skilled in the sale of his pain. In *Following the Equator*, the sole survivor of the *Duncan Dunbar* disaster—a ship carrying mothers and daughters which was wrecked on its journey home—cashes in on his pain by capitalizing on the inexhaustible public interest in sorrow. "He was a person with a practical turn of mind, and he hired a hall in Sydney and exhibited himself at sixpence a head till he exhausted the output of the gold fields for that year" (484). His association with pain is literally a marketable commodity.

Whether storing up pain to trade in for pleasure or mortgaging life's enjoyments with a promise of later sacrifice, a person can find, through the pain economy, an entrance into the moral world. Twain wrote, "Our consciences take *no* notice of pain inflicted upon others until it reaches a point where it gives pain to *us*. In *all* cases without exception we are absolutely indifferent to another person's pain until his sufferings make us uncomfortable" (WM 750). Without pain, Twain believes, we would not be able to understand the full value of our pleasure; we would never be moved to evaluate our actions; we would have no sense of morality at all.

CHAPTER THREE: The Heroes

Readers of Twain's writing encounter not a single, consistent picture of human behavior but a wide spectrum of actions, reactions, impulses, and moral motivations. Tom Quirk suggests that, rather than showing Twain's changing attitudes about human nature, the multiplicity of human conduct in Twain's work shows his belief in humanity as a kind of paradox (*MTHN* 178). We are the slaves of our inborn natures, *and* we are subject to our training. We choose to do evil, *but* evil is the inevitable choice. We are manipulated, *and* we are manipulators of ourselves. We are the sheep, *and* we are the goats. Most people, Twain concluded, are caught in the dizzying maelstrom of a dual nature, but the heroes and the villains of humanity find their way to the edges of the whirlpool. "There are not enough morally brave men in stock," complained Twain in his unpublished essay, "The United States of Lyncherdom," "We are out of moral-courage material; we are in a condition of profound poverty" (484). As Twain saw it, humanity was bound to its iniquity by a regrettable combination of design, birth, and training. Those few who did manage to rise above the depravity of their natures and lead lives of truly selfless service were miraculous anomalies, moral millionaires, worthy of his adulation.

Twain's moral heroes are necessarily rare—the economy cannot support more than a few. There can be "not three hundred of them in the earth," not more

than “one daring man in the 10,000” (“Lyncherdom” 483, 481). By Twain’s measure, the exceptionality of the few puts the lot of us to shame. The general claims to moral superiority espoused by human civilization are, to Twain, laughable. “The human being’s first duty,” he argues, “is to think about himself until he has exhausted the subject, then he is in a condition to take up minor interests and think of other people” (“Was It Heaven?” 534). Twain demonstrates over and over that the precious morality of the masses is really just a gilded cowardice. Most people, Twain says, strive for uniformity. The desire to blend in is perhaps the single most powerful force in determining human behavior. It is “man’s commonest weakness, his aversion to being unpleasantly conspicuous, pointed at, shunned, as being on the unpopular side” (“Lyncherdom” 481). But the heroes are different. They rise above their flawed human nature, earning a wealth of pain for their achievements.

The average moral condition of human beings serves to highlight the heroes as much as their unique morality puts the rest of us in our place. The following humorous passage on reverence is usually read as a snide comment on the haughtiness of people in general. I find no fault with this reading of the piece; I merely add that the passage also implies the possibility of a rare, almost impossible, and hardly ever attempted moral position occupied by the precious few. Normal, everyday reverence “costs nothing,” says Twain:

Reverence for one’s own sacred things—parents, religion, flag, laws, and respect for one’s own beliefs—these are feelings which we cannot even help. They come natural to us: they are involuntary, like breathing. There is no personal merit in breathing. But the reverence which is difficult, and which has personal merit in it, is the respect you

pay, without compulsion, to the political or religious attitude of a man whose beliefs are not yours. (*FE* 755)

The average *can* be exceeded (at cost to the individual, of course), even if most of us will never accomplish this feat. The rarity of the heroes and the commonality of the masses each serves to accentuate the other.

Reginald Selkirk, Twain's "Mad Philosopher" of the antediluvian writings, paints the picture of humanity's billions standing side-by-side, their average height creating "a floor as level as a table" (*BA* 77). Every once in a while, someone with outstanding intellectual abilities will rise above the average, but even these find their corollaries with a certain kind of regularity. Predictable and unwavering, the pattern holds out the world around. Then,

finally, somewhere around the circumference of the globe, you will find, once in five centuries of waiting, one majestic head which overtops the highest of all the others—an author, a teacher, an artist, a martyr, a conqueror, whose fame towers to the stars, and whose name will never perish, never fade, while time shall last. (77)

These are Twain's heroes, anomalous exceptions that prove the rule and are proven by it.

Twain's heroes, rare as they are, do belong to the human race, but they dwell at its furthest extreme of compassion. Their selfless actions, though costly to the hero and therefore rarely attempted by the masses, are not inimitable—Twain could hardly find fault in those who fail to live up to that standard if it were impossible to achieve. Their virtue lies in the willing sacrifice of pleasure for the sake of others. Twain was a compassionate man, but he would not allow himself the title of moral

hero. His sensitivity to the suffering of others was not enough to balance out the hurt that he felt he had inflicted. As auditor general of the pain economy, Twain was able to define and defend the honor of the holy sufferers even as he held the rest of us to account for our failure to measure up. Helen Keller, one of the few people whom Twain found untarnished by her membership in the human race, observed of the author, "He would work himself into a frenzy over dull acquiescence in any evil that could be remedied" (49). He refused to spare himself in these calculations of evil. Mark Twain's daughter, Clara Clemens, remembered that when her father observed suffering in others, his sympathy almost always turned to guilt:

If on any occasion he could manage to trace the cause of some one's mishap to something he himself had done or said, no one could persuade him he was mistaken. Self-condemnation was the natural turn for his mind to take, yet often he accused himself of having inflicted pain or trouble when the true cause was far removed from himself. (Clemens 6-7)

Punishing himself with guilt, Twain could forestall some other kind of retribution demanded by the pain economy. His emotional self-flagellation satisfied, in some small way, the exchange of pain for pain. But he would not allow himself much credit, even for that pain. His guilt was no more an impulse to morality than was lust, greed, or pity. It was an instinctual response, a grasping at payoff, not a choice to suffer for the good of others.

Human nature was entirely, irrefutably, immutably selfish. Twain knew it; he could prove it, he thought, almost to the point of denying heroism altogether. "What Is Man?" preaches a uniformity in human selfishness that had no exceptions. The

mother sacrifices for her child only because it “pays” in pleasure to her spirit (744). The Old Man of the dialogue is convinced that this is the invariable truth for all people: “In *all* cases without exception we are absolutely indifferent to another person’s pain until his sufferings make us uncomfortable” (750). Twain’s personified cynicism provides an explanation for every possible seemingly selfless act. But in his heart Twain harbored something of the idealistic Young Man, too. After all, he does let the rather optimistic instruction to “diligently train your ideals *upward* and *still upward* toward a summit where you will find your chiefest pleasure in conduct which, while contenting you, will be sure to confer benefits upon your neighbor and community” (WM 767) slip through the Old Man’s teachings. The work of self-reform is a successful manipulation of our flawed human nature. Although it seems, at times, that Twain envisions his heroes without the collective faults of human beings, it may be that he sees them as the successful conquerors of a perverse nature. Having learned the workings of their machines, they do whatever is necessary to manipulate their perversity into moral actions.

There were a few rare individuals who—whether by a trick of self-control or a more mystical propensity towards goodness—seemed to be immune to their flawed human condition. Clara defends her father’s faith in humanity, saying that no matter how adamantly he might defend the unassailable logic of the picture of mechanical human depravity he had written about, he was susceptible to a genuine admiration of those he saw acting for the benefit of others (182). Twain’s pedestal was not crowded, but the heroes who mounted it never toppled from their perch.

Heroic qualifications

Those few human beings who attained heroship in Twain's moral universe share a number of striking characteristics. They are soft-spoken, often poor (or enduring financial loss or embarrassment), suffering some kind of physical affliction, frequently ostracized from certain social circles, excruciatingly humble, and radically moral.²⁰ Twain's heroes are both pain recipients and pain relievers; unless provoked by force or honor, they will never intentionally hurt another person. In the pain economy, they owe nothing at all.

It is no easy thing to be Twain's hero. To be moral, in Twain's world, is to be in pain. For those living in a constant state of uncompensated suffering—such as the poor—any and all acts of revenge are technically permitted. Do we really blame a starving man who steals bread? "I find that principles have no real force," writes Twain, "except when one is well fed" (*BA* 11-12). If they would choose it, these heroes' pain could cover a multitude of sins. But Twain's heroes, who are awash in unredeemed pain, earn their position as moral exemplars by emphatically refusing to cash in on their pain.

Physical ailment was an ideal kind of pain for Twain's heroes because it could not, with the exception of something like venereal disease, be "earned" by the

²⁰ It is no coincidence that this description of Mark Twain's heroes bears some resemblance to the "ideal" Victorian woman. The long-suffering, morally irreproachable "angel in the house" created by the collective Victorian imagination was holy to Twain. Although not all of his heroes were women, Twain's essential pattern for moral perfection was, by nineteenth-century measures, rather feminine.

sufferer. The injustice of physical ailment almost always evoked Twain's sympathy and his moral admiration. Reflecting on a Hawaiian leper colony, Twain writes, "And one great pity of it all is, that these poor sufferers are innocent. The leprosy does not come of sins which they committed, but of sins committed by their ancestors, who *escaped* the curse of leprosy!" (*FE* 450). Observe how eager Twain is to land the blame on somebody. To find his culprits, he breaks out an Old Testament understanding of sin and retribution. The leprosy patients in Twain's observation are subject to "a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject [him]" (Exodus 20:5). Twain's insistence that those suffering from leprosy were not to blame for their disease was fairly forward-thinking for the time. The popular understanding—and, in some cases, even the scientific understanding—of the disease pegged the root of infection in immoral behavior or slovenly personal habits, Ron Amundson tells us. Leprosy patients were loaded not only with their disease but with the "stigma of impairment"; their sores were judged as "loathsome signs of physical and moral filth" (Amundson). Twain was not wholly immune to this line of thought—after all, he erroneously attributes the suffering of the patients to their parents' actions, perhaps sexual immorality. But his instinct is to defend those who suffer under the threat of wrongful aspersion.

As with his grandest heroes, suffering lepers must contend with a divine adversary rather than a divine benefactor, which adds greatly to their struggles. Moreover, their suffering is increased because they are rejected by both their

creator and their society. In this regard, too, a leper colony is the very picture of undeserved suffering. Twain includes story after story of people either ripped away from their families or self-exiled for the sake of preserving those they love from their disease. While the lepers do not attain full heroism, Twain sanctifies their suffering in his text.

The sick receive Twain's compassion and admiration for their unrewarded suffering—and he clears them of moral responsibility for it—but they do not suffer willingly or gladly. Twain's truest heroes are not agentless victims; they opt to carry their pain without complaint. Twain needed to speak for his suffering heroes because they would never speak for themselves. In contrast to the rest of the human race, they suppress their own needs and desires in favor of other people. Their main purpose is to relieve the pain of others, even if it comes at great personal cost. Twain's heroes display a radical morality. They adhere to the principles of their belief with unheard of bravery. Furthermore, they face the constant threat that they will be shunned for their moral choices by popular society, sometimes even by religious institutions. But the heroes disregard this personal peril for the sake of their principles. In the story "Was It Heaven? Or Hell?" the character nicknamed "The Only Christian" ponders the virtue of a soul so fragile that a lie, even to save a friend, could damn it forever. For him—and for Twain—the real moral hero is the one that demonstrates an understanding of morality beyond the black and white Sunday-school definitions of sin. "*Risk your souls!*" the Only Christian urges the old women in the story, "risk them in good causes; then if you lose them, why should

you care? Reform!" (534). True moral heroes will risk even their own salvation for the sake of a good cause. That good cause, of course: the alleviation of pain in another.

Although the Only Christian paints selfless morality as a voluntary act, Twain flirts with the possibility that the heroes are deluded into self-sacrifice by their own strict moral code, abused by a traditional morality handed to them by God, the church, or some other social authority.²¹ These heroes break themselves to pieces striving for an unattainable moral goal. These quixotic types, Bergson writes, "are runners who fall and simple souls who are being hoaxed—runners after the ideal who stumble over realities, child-like dreamers for whom life delights to lie in wait" (7). It is a weighted game. The hand they trusted was cruel, spiteful, and they are bound to suffer for their unrealistic ideals.

This is not the whole picture, however. Even as Twain gives his heroes a childlike trust in the goodness of God, the church, the government, the universe, etc., he also allows them a clear vision of their challenges. In this way, Twain's heroes are quite unlike the heroes within the American tradition. "Societally," writes Lyn Cowan, "the heroic ego in America rides on in glory, usually oblivious to the hard reality that every silver lining has a cloud" (29). Any sign of "weakness or failure of nerve (and depression)," says Cowan, profanes the American hero (29). But Twain's

²¹ The total abandonment to a harmful traditional code is embodied by Joan of Arc and her self-destructive dedication to the Catholic church, its teachings, and its leaders. Other examples of suffering by adherence to moral codes, though less heroic than Joan of Arc, can be found in stories like "The Story of the Good Little Boy Who Did Not Prosper" and "Edward Mills and George Benton: A Tale."

heroes *are* weak; at times, they come very near the breaking point. At times, they break. They recognize the injustice they fight; they wrestle with the impossibility of their task. At the lowest point, they are even defeated by immorality and injustice—they become martyrs.

Twain was fascinated by acts of martyrdom. As Justin Kaplan explains, “The United States of Lyncherdom” was meant to be the beginning of a longer project, a kind of *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* for Southern lynchings. It was to be, writes Kaplan, “a subscription-book history of lynching in America” (364). Twain envisioned some three thousand records in the collection. It would catch the public interest, he thought, at least in the North, and would spur a movement towards justice. Twain did not write that book, but martyrs found their way into print in his other works.

The martyr’s reward comes in the form of the honor they receive for their sacrifice. They are conservative investors in the pain economy—putting off all recompense until the final reckoning. For those who practice “sacrificial pain,” Staci Newmahr informs us, there is no pleasure: “Pain is, and must remain, *suffering*, for the suffering is a sacrifice on the part of the bottom” (137). In an SM scene based on this kind of arrangement, the sacrificial pain has value and gives pleasure, but it is meant for someone other than the masochist-martyr. “[T]he bottom gives her experience of pain willingly, a token to the top of her affection or devotion” (137). It is a loving act, an act of giving with no reward. Cowan argues that because suffering comes from a wholly external source for martyrs—they do not seek it themselves—they miss out on the deeper psychological benefits of masochism (78). Their reward

is spiritual in nature, and it is usually deferred until after death. In the case of Twain's heroes, they achieve moral superiority *because* they glean no pleasurable reward within the pain economy. Refusing to participate in the retaliatory system of the pain-pleasure exchange, they rise above the baseness of their fellow human beings to a moral pinnacle. Like the suffering itself, their reward is foisted upon them from outside. Twain's moral heroes pursue neither suffering nor glory, but they attain both. It is their redemption. Twain may have rejected the moral rules of a Christian morality, but he respected its tradition of honoring its pure and faithful sufferers. "Before science regarded masochism as a disease," writes Cowan, "religion regarded it as a cure" (19). The idea of purification through suffering plays an important part in defining the moral implications of Twain's pain economy.

Although Twain's writings are littered with innocent sufferers, radically moral and underappreciated, I will focus on four figures that epitomize Twain's moral ideal: Ulysses S. Grant, Helen Keller, Joan of Arc, and the combined figure of Livy Clemens and Eve.²² Naturally, these four are not the only morally exemplary people Twain ever wrote about. Heroic characteristics appear, in bits in pieces, in characters throughout Twain's writing career. Echoes of Twain's admiration for Grant, Keller, Joan of Arc, Livy, and Eve can also be found in his remembrances of Dr.

²² The pain economy is a function of the mind of Mark Twain, and it finds its fullest function within his writing. I will frequently reference what may be regarded as the private writings of Samuel Clemens rather than the creative work of Mark Twain. However, I find it implausible that the two are totally distinct. Whenever Samuel Clemens put pen to paper, Mark Twain was present, if not dominant. Regardless, they admired the same people, and Clemens' (or Twain's) private reflections are useful in understanding exactly how and why he honored them.

John Brown of Edinburgh, Twain's brother Henry Clemens, Father Peter of *The Chronicle of Young Satan*, Ah Song Hi of "Goldsmith's Friend Abroad Again," and many others who appear from time to time—sometimes even whole groups of people. No character, however, real or fictional, ever supplanted these primary heroes. Twain believed in them so whole-heartedly that his admiration sometimes rewrote the truth of their lives. "Truth is stranger than fiction," Twain writes, "but it is because Fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; Truth isn't" (*FE* 512). Twain believed that, in these heroes, he had found a Truth so rare, so impossible, as to be beyond imagination's reach. Twain underestimated his own powerful and reverent imagination.

Ulysses S. Grant

General Ulysses S. Grant is perhaps the foremost example of Twain's tendency to elevate his heroes beyond the bounds of reality. Grant's political career, particularly his tenure in the White House, was plagued with scandal after scandal, ultimately bringing down many prominent figures in his cabinet. But there was something about General Grant that elevated him beyond the run-of-the-mill politician, at least for Twain. Grant was averse to self-promotion. In the opening sentences of his book, *Grant and Twain*, Mark Perry calls Grant "slight, compact, even forgettable" (xv). He goes on to describe him as a meek, apolitical man, happier to take abuse than enter an argument (6). Grant was anything but "forgettable" to Twain, partly because of his meek and long-suffering approach to life. In the end,

however, it was probably Twain's personal debt to Grant—his memoirs proved an immense boon to Twain's publishing company—that paid his admission as one of Twain's moral heroes. Twain was so enamored of Grant that he seems to have invented several encounters between them (Powers 226). Several biographers note that Twain tried to rearrange war history so that, when retelling the story of his brief stint as a militia member for the Confederates, he would miss meeting Grant on the battlefield by mere hours (reduced from the several weeks and miles of space that actually separated them). Long after Grant's death—and well after the profit Twain had made by publishing Grant's memoirs had been squandered on the Paige Compositor—Grant continued to reign as the immortal hero in Twain's imagination. The short story "Which Was the Dream?"²³ features Grant as the placid hero in the midst of chaos. The narrator of "Which Was the Dream?" records a scene of frantic, lethal fear—the house is on fire, and a group of women and children are on the verge of stampeding to their certain deaths, "but Grant did not wait for that. He spoke up in the calm and confident voice which stills troubled human waters by some subtle magic not explicable by the hearer but which compels his obedience" (237). He leads the group confidently to safety. In Twain's imagination, the power of Grant's personality was very nearly superhuman.

What we know of Grant tells us that he was a decent and conscientious person. Before his rise to fame and honor as general of the Union Army, Grant struggled to make a good living in business and agriculture. Grant's neighbors

²³ Written in 1897 but unpublished during Twain's lifetime.

attributed his failure at farming to the fact that he refused to whip the three slaves his father-in-law had loaned him to help work the farm (Perry 26). Grant was not a skilled farmer, and practicing the kind of inhumane brutality expected of him would not have magically brought him success. Grant's willingness to employ slaves at all is disgraceful, but Twain would have read stories like these as evidence of Grant's selflessness and gentleness. Twain's devotion to his hero was totally revisionist. Other stories, specifically from Grant's service in the Mexican-American War, that speak to his thoughtfulness and his sense of honor, though not without a healthy dose of moral ambiguity. Like many other Americans at the time, Grant was critical of his country's choice to pursue the war. Torn between his duty as a soldier and his reluctance to participate in a war he felt to be unjust, Grant eventually served his time in the army and then resigned (Perry 117-18). During his first brief military career, however, he proved himself a good leader on the battlefield—concerned for the welfare of his men and willing to risk his own safety to accomplish his mission. His steadiness and bravery as a military leader were essential to the victory of the Union Army in the ensuing Civil War. Those who served with or under Ulysses S. Grant, including William Tecumseh Sherman, consistently reported him to be a levelheaded, humble, and courageous leader.

Twain aggrandized Grant in his memory and in his writing. Grant ranks among royalty and legends. Twain compares him to Sir Lancelot of Arthur's Camelot—'meek,' 'stern,' and 'true' (A2 218-29). In *Following the Equator*, the humorist describes himself, in relation to Grant, as just another "stray cat [that]

might look at another king" (432). Even in "The Babies," a speech Twain delivered for a banquet of Civil War veterans, the author hinges his joke on the assumption that Grant can do whatever he sets his mind to. (Since he is a baby in this scenario, the goal is to get his big toe into his mouth.) Later, Twain would look back on the speech with pride, having achieved the impossible—he made Grant laugh.²⁴ This is a great achievement for a humorist: to reach a man who wore "the iron expression of a man who had not smiled for seven years, and was not intending to smile for another seven" (*FE* 432). He treasured the memory all his life.

Twain would never try to bring Grant down to his level, however. Grant's grim demeanor contributed to his moral reputation as one of Twain's heroes. His seriousness reflected the suffering he had endured in his life. In Twain's *Autobiography*, he catalogues Grant's pain with care: the grand deception of Grant and his sons by their business partner, Ferdinand Ward, resulting in their financial ruin; the failed efforts to restore Grant's status as a retired general so that he, now in dire need of money, could claim a military pension; the treacherous, if ingenuous, contracts offered Grant by the Century publishers; and so on. Twain does not miss even the most petty annoyance in his records. Because of his popularity with Julia,

²⁴ Ron Powers refers to this speech and Twain's acquisition of the contract for the memoirs as a triumph over Grant (493). As Powers sees it, Twain later gloated that making Grant laugh was a "victory"—"I knew I could lick him." I contend Twain's claims of defeating his hero should not be taken at face value. There is something innately funny about using an irreverent tone on someone so tenderly revered. Twain is more the adoring parishioner, giggling about the mere idea of the Pope passing gas, than the Archbishop of Canterbury, publicly calling out his counterpart as a slovenly pig. Twain enjoyed the thrill of making Grant laugh, of pleasing him, but he would only ever strive to defend the General, not conquer him.

the General's wife, Rev. John Phillip Newman found a place close to the General, and he forced prayers, even baptism, upon the dying man in spite of Grant's personal leaning toward quiet agnosticism. One day, Newman emerged from the sickroom to speak with reporters and produced this alleged Grant quote: "Thrice have I been in the shadow of the valley of death and thrice have I come out again." Twain resents the obvious misrepresentation: "General Grant never used flowers of speech, and dead or alive he never could have uttered anything like that, either as a quotation or otherwise" (41 99). For Twain, a man defined by his words, being misquoted was an unbearable pain. Grant's simple, straightforward use of language set him apart from other men of power, and Twain was loathe to let anyone tarnish the image.

Ulysses S. Grant, Mark Twain's hero, was a man without pretensions, a man who did not pursue the celebrity he ultimately earned. Grant's unsought greatness left him a simple, stately man to the end of his days. Twain was not the only admirer to think so. Grant's humility could not totally excuse the failures of his presidency to the American people, but it allowed him to transition into private life with a semblance of dignity. Despite the scandals within his administration, Perry reports, Grant himself remained a fairly pure figure in the public opinion, forever retaining his reputation as "the modest soldier" (33). The residents of Nook Farm, Mark Twain's Hartford neighborhood, did not blame Grant for the corruption in his government; instead, they chalked it up to the individual failings of the parties involved (Andrews 111). The success of Grant's world tour, taken soon after his

second term as president, indicated that this opinion was shared by people everywhere.

The disastrous collapse of the Grant & Ward brokerage firm, however, struck a blow to the General's reputation. Grant's pain, in the aftermath of Ward's betrayal and the firm's demise, was both financial and psychological. Seeing his name in the papers, couched in accusations of misconduct, was especially painful. The collapse of the pyramid scheme bearing his name sullied Grant's public reputation. Perry explains that, for Grant, the shame was intolerable:

That he could be shown to be so gullible, so eager, to have so willingly pranced and prattled with the barons of Wall Street, to have pretended to be one of them, and to have fulfilled his dream of being not simply a successful soldier but now a man of means . . . to have accomplished this and then, at the pinnacle, to see the eyes of those he admired averted when he appeared on the street—this, more than any debt, was a wound that would not heal. (xxxi)

Twain believed that the “mental miseries” of having “the unimpeachable credit and respectability of his name” used against him were the real cause of Grant's fatal throat cancer (A2 66).

Grant's pride dictated that he regain his reputation under his own steam. He refused immediate rescue from friends and, instead, sold his personal property and wrote a few articles on the Civil War to pay his debts. Twain read Grant's pride as selfless humility, and he honored him for it. More astoundingly, Twain saw that Grant was unwilling to seek vengeance on Ferdinand Ward himself, who more than any other had earned the wrath of the cool-headed general. Grant's restraint wasn't because he was unscathed by Ward's treachery, however. Twain observes that when

Grant spoke of Ward, “he spoke as a man speaks who has been deeply wronged and humiliated and betrayed; but he never used a venomous expression or one of a vengeful nature” (41 82). Twain, on the other hand, did not demonstrate the same kind of self-control:

I was inwardly boiling all the time: I was scalping Ward, flaying him alive, breaking him on the wheel, pounding him to jelly, and cursing him with all the profanity known to the one language that I am acquainted with, and helping it out in times of difficulty and distress with odds and ends of profanity drawn from the two other languages of which I have a limited knowledge. (83)

Twain knew that his heroes functioned above the trivialities of the pain economy, but he had no such limitations. On behalf of his heroes, he would make the villains pay, if only with his words.

Like all of Twain’s heroes, Grant retained his minor human flaws, if only to give his accomplishments some meaning. If he weren’t human, after all, it would be no great thing to be moral. Grant’s telltale human failing—the great pride that Twain read as moral superiority—consistently showed itself when it came to his reputation. Often, the need to restore his public honor simply superseded Grant’s need for personal revenge. When Adam Badeau, Grant’s personal assistant since the war, began to spread rumors that he was ghostwriting Grant’s memoirs (he was rightly worried that his own history of the war would be overshadowed by Grant’s book), Grant largely ignored Badeau personally in the fiasco (Perry 198-200). Instead, the General focused his limited energies on providing proof that he was the sole author of his work. Twain, who was famously vindictive towards anyone who

dared alter his words in print, could easily understand the importance of protecting one's literary reputation. Once again, Twain took up Grant's slack and sought revenge on his behalf. After the New York *World* published the rumors, writes Powers, "[a]n infuriated Twain launched a campaign to smoke out the source of the libel, calling on all his friends at the newspapers to help him" (500-501). Badeau, who was not above vengeful tactics himself, soon started another rumor that the ghostwriter was not him but Twain. Still, Grant did not seek retribution on his slanderer; he merely wanted to be sure that the public knew the truth and that his reputation as an honest man was not harmed.

Twain refused to see Grant's pride as a flaw. He conflated it with honesty and a sense of honor. What surprised Twain was that Grant's prideful concern for public approval could be satisfied by praise from the humorist himself. Fearing that Twain's silence, after receiving the proofs of the memoir manuscripts, meant that he did not like them, Grant pressed those around him to solicit Twain's feedback on his behalf (Perry 174-75). According to Kaplan, Twain was fairly astonished that his opinion could mean so much to the General: "He later said he felt the way Columbus' cook would have felt if Columbus had asked his views on navigation" (273). Twain recognized the hunger for praise all too well. "An author values a compliment even when it comes from a source of doubtful competency," Twain explains (42 72). Of course, Twain had only the highest praise for his hero's writing.

Grant's crisis of reputation came in tandem with financial strife, which added to his store of suffering in Twain's eyes. The fact that some of Grant's financial

difficulties were generated from altruistic actions only increased their value to Twain. When Grant was elected president, several other politicians urged him to take a leave of absence from the army so that he could retain his right to a military pension. But Grant refused, knowing that doing so would prevent others—namely, Sherman—from advancing to the honored position Grant had held (Perry 130). He retired his position, passing up his well-deserved reward, not because failing to do so would hurt another, but because it might prevent additional benefit to his friend.

Twain was enchanted with the image of Grant as an abused national hero, and he did what he could to further it. When dictating for the *Autobiography*, Twain vaguely remembered Col. Fred Grant, General Grant's son, telling him that his father was poor, even in debt, at the end of his second term (A1 76). The *Autobiography* notes explain that the facts of the matter are entirely otherwise. Although Grant's income after his world tour did not suffice to cover the family's cost of living, he was not in debt (A1 482-483). Mark Twain exaggerated the financial suffering so as to increase the moral capital of his hero. Grant's own assurances that he was owed nothing only served to perpetuate Twain's belief in his selflessness. Twain publicly shamed his countrymen for failing to provide financial support to a national hero; in response, "Grant, of course, said that this country had more than sufficiently rewarded him and that he was well satisfied" (A1 76). Twain's "of course" is a basic commentary on Grant's character. He is eager to show Grant as habitually gracious and diffident, despite his clear right to reward for his sacrifice.

Although Twain admired Grant's morally debt-free position, he did what he could to reward and relieve the suffering of the General. As was his custom, Twain kept careful track of exactly how much Grant was owed, both in public honor and in dollar amounts. Grant had been writing articles for *The Century Magazine* about his experiences in the Civil War. When Twain learned the amount he was being paid for the articles—although it was perfectly fair by contemporary standards—he was incensed:

The thing which astounded me was, that, admirable man as Gilder²⁵ certainly is, and with a heart which is in the right place, it had never seemed to occur to him that to offer General Grant \$500 for a magazine article was not only the monumental insult of the nineteenth century, but of all centuries. He ought to have known that if he had given General Grant a check for \$10,000 the sum would still have been trivial; that if he had paid him \$20,000 for a single article the sum would still have been inadequate; that if he had paid him \$30,000 for a single magazine war article it still could not be called paid for; that if he had given him \$40,000 for a single magazine article he would still be in General Grant's debt. (41 77-78)

By the numbers, the publishers were cheats and villains. Twain saw himself as defending an innocent victim when he inserted himself into Grant's contract negotiations with Century. As was his wont, when Twain retold the story of how he obtained the rights to publish Grant's memoirs, he had a tendency to stretch the truth somewhat. Whereas Twain would have it that he merely chanced to overhear the news that Grant was considering publishing his memoirs with the Century Company, he actually got all the details directly from a confident Richard Watson Gilder, who had already begun negotiations with Grant (Perry 83-84). Twain went

²⁵ Richard Watson Gilder, editor of *The Century Magazine*.

to Grant and urged him to ask for 75 percent of the profits from his memoirs—far and above what Century had offered. “The idea distressed General Grant,” says Twain. “He thought it placed him in the attitude of a robber—robber of a publisher” (42 61). Twain assures him that robbing a publisher, even if were possible, would be no moral failing. “I said it was not a crime, and was always rewarded in heaven with two halos” (61). Twain eventually convinced Grant to let him publish the memoirs at Charles L. Webster & Co., his own publishing house.

Even after Grant agreed, however, Twain found it difficult to repay his hero as he would have liked. Grant’s pride, once again, got in the way. When Twain offered him an advance on the book, Grant

said he could not think of taking in advance any sum of money large or small which the publisher would not be absolutely *sure* of getting back again. . . . This was just like General Grant. It was absolutely impossible for him to entertain for a moment any proposition which might prosper him at the risk of any other man. (41 81)

As much as he might have wanted to deny it, Grant desperately needed the money, and they eventually settled on selling the rights to Webster & Co. to ward off an embarrassing money crunch for the Grants (Perry 119). The book’s eventual profits more than paid back this favor.

Another and a crucial quality of suffering that Grant possessed, which ennobled him to Twain, was physical affliction. The last year of Grant’s life was largely defined by his disease. The throat cancer that would claim his life was excruciatingly painful, eventually making it difficult for the General to sleep, eat, and breathe. Grant’s suffering, especially in his last months, was a matter of great public

interest and concern. But Twain had been tracking Grant's physical ailments for some time. In Twain's account of an 1883 visit to Grant with Yung Wing, a diplomat from China, he makes special mention of Grant's physical condition. Twain and Yung are visiting General Grant to beg his influence in the construction of a railroad; Grant, Twain reports, is "cooped up in his room with a severe rheumatism resulting from a fall on the ice" (41 72). The ex-president agrees to do what he can, but, characteristically, refuses any compensation for his help. This small gesture of unremunerated service in a time of suffering was only the palest foreshadowing of what was to come.

By the time Twain knew about Grant's cancer, it was already fairly advanced. Twain's eyes were riveted on the body of the suffering man, his hero. He studies Grant's frailty over the stretch of hours, recording his pain in minute detail:

I will remark, in passing, that the General's hands were very thin, and they showed, far more than did his face, how his long siege of confinement and illness and insufficient food had wasted him. He was at this time suffering great and increasing pain from the cancer at the root of his tongue, but there was nothing ever discoverable in the expression of his face to betray this fact as long as he was awake. When asleep his face would take advantage of him and make revelations. (41 89)

Grant's suffering accentuated his greatness in Twain's eyes. Kaplan writes that, for Twain, "Grant in his last days had fully regained the stature of a hero and also that no one had ever sufficiently noted Grant's 'exceeding gentleness, goodness, sweetness'" (273).

All the while, Grant wrote his memoirs with unabated dedication. He did it for the benefit of his wife and children, but it would be a boon to Twain, as well. The contract Twain offered the General was generous, but he couldn't avoid falling into the sufferer's debt. Not all surrounding Grant in his final days were reluctant to exploit his pain for their own benefit. Joseph Drexel and his business partner W. J. Arkell, for instance, arranged for Grant to travel to their Mt. McGregor, New York, resort as his health was deteriorating, *hoping* that he would die while he stayed there and make the place a popular tourist destination (Perry 209). They were not disappointed. For the American public, Grant's suffering was riveting, and the romance of his final days—a dying man scratching out the memories of his glory days to save his impoverished family—was irresistible. The cottage where he finally died is now a preserved state historic site in New York. As it happened, that same public interest was good for Twain's business, and the book sold very well.

Twain knew it would. According to Twain, it was “morally bound to sell” (A1 78). He knew that Grant may not live to reap the dividends of his troubles, but the pain economy always returns to a balance eventually. The memoirs were Twain's way of participating in the reward of his moral hero. Whenever he told the story of Grant's memoirs, Twain placed himself—admiring and solicitous—at Grant's elbow, encouraging him to demand better terms of his publishers, casually offering to publish the book himself on the best of terms possible if Century or any other publisher balks at the suggested split, etc. Twain depicts himself as humble servant to his mighty, suffering hero. He even clung to the idea that writing the memoirs

extended Grant's life, and with some justification. "[Grant's] memoirs would become his reason for living," writes Perry, "the means by which he tapped into the enormous reservoirs of strength that, at the most important moments of his life, he had always believed were there" (142).

The memoirs proved to be the vehicle of Grant's public redemption. The scandals of his presidency and the embarrassment of his financial ruin were, once again, eclipsed by his role in the Union victory. As if responding to Twain's moral imperative, Americans made *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant* a best seller. Twain was able to present Julia Grant with an unprecedented royalty check for \$200,000 (she would eventually receive a total of about \$450,000 from the book). It was of monumental importance to Twain that he had enabled the production of Grant's book.

Twain defended the memoirs as scripture. When Matthew Arnold wrote a piece criticizing, in part, Grant's grammatical errors, Twain was ready and vocal with his rebuttal. Grant was above censure for petty mistakes, Twain argued, as are all great writers. Twain's opinion about the literary value of the book was fixed: "[T]he fact remains and cannot be dislodged, that General Grant's book is a great, and in its peculiar department unique and unapproachable literary masterpiece" ("Dinner Speech" 907). Having established Grant as one of his heroes, Twain was wholehearted in his worship. After getting news of Grant's death, Twain recorded his opinion of his hero in simple and absolute terms: "He was a very great man--& superlatively good" (*Notebooks III* 163). By his own confession, Twain overlooked

whatever flaws Grant might have in deference to his innate superiority: “There is that about the sun which makes us forget his spots” (“Dinner Speech 908).

Twain forgot all of Grant’s spots. In the pain economy, his sins were harmless, totally erased by the good he bestowed on his nation. In Twain’s estimation, he was a hero, plain and simple. His love for the General was uninhibited. When it came time to decide where to bury General Grant, some criticized New York as the wrong choice because it was not “national ground.” Mark Twain responded: “Wherever General Grant’s body lies, that is national ground” (Powers 504). It is hard not to hear, in this, Adam’s voice speaking of his lost partner, “Wheresoever she was, there was Eden.”

Helen Keller

Helen Keller, who lost her sight and hearing when she was still a toddler, was fourteen years old when she first met the famous author, Mark Twain. It was March of 1895. “The instant I clasped his hand in mine, I knew that he was my friend,” she reminisces in her third autobiographical book, *Midstream: My Later Life* (48). The connection between the girl and the humorist was absolute. One guest at the event remembered seeing tears standing in Mark Twain’s eyes when he first met the girl (Shelden 312). She listened to him tell stories with her fingers at his lips, laughing with him at all the right places. Remembering that day years later, Twain bragged about Helen’s observational skills. She was an astute listener, keenly aware of the mood of the room, and she even played magician for her audience, identifying guests

by a single handshake. Although Twain had merely patted her on the head as he went by, she still knew who it was (*A1* 466). Twain even endowed their first meeting with the paranormal occurrence of “mental telegraphy.” Anne Sullivan was quizzing Helen about the guests and asked her what Samuel Clemens was known for. “His humor,” replied the girl. Twain chimed in from across the room, “And for his wisdom.” As he was paying himself this compliment, the girl amended her description with his exact words, much to his delight (*A1* 465). Knowing that she couldn’t have heard him make the joke, Twain took the coincidence as a sign that they were kindred spirits.

Mark Twain remained a part of Helen Keller’s life for many years. There are conflicting reports whether, on the day Keller and Twain first met, whether Twain had invited his friend, Henry Huttleston Rogers of Standard Oil, to join him or whether the invitation came from Rogers. Regardless, at Twain’s impassioned request, Rogers went on to support Keller throughout her college career. Twain was often called upon to represent Rogers in negotiations on Keller’s behalf.²⁶ Serving as Keller’s advocate and witnessing her perseverance in the face of disability, Twain got accustomed to the idea that she needed his protection. He was delighted to provide it.

The connection between Twain and Keller went beyond that of hero and worshipper. She entered his life just before the death of his daughter, Susy. After Susy’s death, Powers says, advocating on Helen’s behalf turned out to be “a bright

²⁶ As we will see in the next chapter, Rogers preferred to give his charitable activities a low profile to avoid tarnishing his reputation as a heartless businessman.

moment in a dark season” for Twain (583). She was not just a distraction for a grief-worn mind, though. Her personality was as much a source of brightness as was her need for him. As Michael Sheldon suggests, one of the things Twain liked about Helen Keller was her quick sense of humor. She was both a hero and a playmate for him. When Keller visited Stormfield in January of 1909, their exchanges were sweetly accented by banter. “Helen’s talk sparkles,” Twain said of his young friend. “She is unusually quick and bright. The person who fires off smart felicities seldom has the luck to hit her in a dumb place; she is almost certain to send back as good as she gets, and almost as certainly with an improvement added” (42 375). She teased him about eating too much pie; he offered to teach her billiards (arguing that a blind person couldn’t play any worse than his friends) and made sure she knew where the liquor was kept. Twain, who in his last years preferred to spend long mornings in bed dictating his work, even offered her a spot in bed with him so she could get some writing done while she was visiting (Keller 59). Their playful relationship likely reinforced his fatherly, protective feelings towards her; he had a similarly light-hearted relationship with his own daughters. On the last night of her visit to Stormfield, Twain, dressed in his red Oxford gown, kissed her on the forehead “as a cardinal or pope or feudal monarch might have kissed a little child” (Keller 63). Her youth and her spirit allowed him to cherish her more tenderly than he did a hero like General Grant. His affection was not lost on her, and she loved him back in equal measure.

Twain's paternal affection for Helen Keller did not compromise his reverent admiration of her, however. "Helen Keller is the eighth wonder of the world; Mrs. [Anne Sullivan] Macy is the ninth," Twain proclaimed (A2 374). She was, to him, the noblest of human beings: "She stands alone in history" (375). Watching her succeed in spite of her staggering physical struggles, Twain placed her among the most famous and accomplished people he could think of. "I need not go into any particulars about Helen Keller," he writes. "She is fellow to Caesar, Alexander, Napoleon, Homer, Shakspeare, and the rest of the immortals. She will be as famous a thousand years from now as she is to-day" (A1 465). A thousand years have not yet passed, but Helen Keller's name remains familiar, though her writings are not anywhere near the canonical status of Shakespeare's, Homer's, or even Twain's. In his imagination, however, Twain was willing to heap on her the glory of the ages. She was his standard of excellence and achievement.

Like many of Twain's other heroes, Keller's physical disability built up her cache in the pain economy. Clara Clemens remarks that her father frequently used Helen Keller as an example of the human ability to rise above adverse circumstances; her successes demonstrated the principle of mind over matter (183). Twain was proud of what Helen could do in spite of her inability to hear or see. He loved to test her sensory perception, giving her flowers to identify and asking if she could feel the musical vibrations of the piano in the next room (Keller 56-57). In *Following the Equator*, Twain uses Keller's life to demonstrate the potential accomplishments of a good education:

Helen Kellar [sic] has been dumb, stone deaf, and stone blind, ever since she was a little baby a year-and-a-half old; and now at sixteen years of age this miraculous creature, this wonder of all the ages, passes the Harvard University examination in Latin, German, French history, *belles lettres*, and such things, and does it brilliantly, too, not in a commonplace fashion. She doesn't know merely *things*, she is splendidly familiar with the *meanings* of them. (816)

Twain's argument is that Anne Sullivan's teaching brought her to these heights. Public school, on the other hand, would leave a person more impaired than Helen was to begin with. But Helen Keller, herself, displayed a healthy dose of fortitude. When asked why she attended Radcliffe, Keller responded, "Because they didn't want me at Radcliffe, and as I was stubborn by nature, I chose to override their objections" (Keller 104). Keller's self-sufficiency meant that she really needed Twain less than he might have liked, but her attitude towards life pleased him.

More than any of Twain's other heroes, Keller thought and wrote about her devotee as much as he thought and wrote about her. Keller's reflections on Twain are both insightful and unaffected. Given his fame at the time of their meeting, it is not surprising that she also seems to be something of an admirer of his. Her praise of him is frank, succinct: "More than anyone else I have ever known except Dr. Alexander Graham Bell and my teacher,²⁷ he aroused in me the feeling of mingled tenderness and awe" (47). They fascinated each other and kept in touch, mostly through letters, throughout the years of their acquaintance. Keller appreciated Twain for what he was—both humorist and wise man—and she preferred him unfiltered. "He talked delightfully, audaciously, brilliantly. His talk was fragrant with

²⁷ Anne Sullivan Macy

tobacco and flamboyant with profanity. I adored him because he did not temper his conversation to any femininity. He was a playboy sometimes and on occasions liked to show off" (56). Her open appreciation of his whole character freed him from the constraints of propriety or modesty, both of which annoyed him at times. By Keller's account, he made free use of the freedom she offered him and did not shy away from his tenderer emotions, but neither did he spare her his puckish perversity.

Because of this openness, Keller felt confident enough to make declarations about who Mark Twain *was* at heart. In his *Autobiography*, Twain records a letter Helen Keller wrote to him to share with a charity organization for the blind that he was supporting: "You once told me you were a pessimist, Mr. Clemens; but great men are usually mistaken about themselves. You are an optimist" (41 467). She felt she was able to sort out his bluster from his true feelings, and the resulting picture was quite flattering. Keller elaborates on the humane Twain in *Midstream*. She writes of the incongruity of his self-image and the man she knew, "He thought he was a cynic, but his cynicism did not make him indifferent to the sight of cruelty, unkindness, meanness, or pretentiousness" (49). Indeed, Twain was highly attuned to these sins, as is evidenced by his tireless tracking of them through the pain economy. Of course, Twain is as interested in the offenders as he is in their victims. Twain's suffering heroes are valuable to him, in part, *because* they lead him to his villains. Twain's statement of support for the charity for the blind harps on the fact that Congress has long been protecting "our lawless railway corporations, our rotten beef trusts, our vast robber dens of insurance magnates" while those truly in

need of protection suffer (41 464). As Twain saw it, Helen Keller was now calling for the neglectful world to support those who, like her, had been waiting so patiently for help. Twain enthusiastically joined her cause, but he deferred always to Keller as the mastermind of compassion.

When standing next to Helen Keller, Twain was happy to debase himself, especially if it could add to her glory. Try as he might to glorify at his own expense, however, Keller was devoted to the project of uplifting him. Unwittingly playing into her role as moral hero, she lavished pleasure and praise on Twain, who considered himself wholly unworthy. Keller saw his self-doubt as an invitation to exalt over his better qualities, and she did her work faithfully. She once tried to assure Twain that he had accomplished much in the literary world. "Ah Helen," he replied, "you have a honeyed tongue; but you don't understand. I have only amused people. Their laughter has submerged me" (Keller 51). But Keller maintains that he belongs among the greatest of American writers. "He incorporated the age he lived in. To me he symbolizes the pioneer qualities—the large, free, unconventional, humorous point of view of men who sail new seas and blaze new trails through the wilderness" (51-52). Writing long after his death, she gets the final word on the subject, cementing his debt to her.

Twain was charmed and surprised to find that Helen Keller could find a way to even the score between them. She would have climbed down from her hero's pedestal if he had let her. Keller made much of the gift of Twain's friendship,

claiming that her suffering was lessened just by being in his company. She is explicit—her pain is lessened by his presence in her life.

It has been said that life has treated me harshly; and sometimes I have complained in my heart because many pleasures of human experience have been withheld from me, but when I recollect the treasure of friendship that has been bestowed upon me I withdraw all charges against life. If much has been denied me, much, very much has been given me. (Keller 67)

His friendship was the kind that negated the supposed limitations inflicted on her by her physical condition. “To one hampered and circumscribed as I am it was a wonderful experience to have a friend like Mr. Clemens,” writes Keller:

I recall many talks with him about human affairs. He never made me feel that my opinions were worthless, as so many people do. He knew that we do not think with eyes and ears, and that our capacity for thought is not measured by five senses. He kept me always in mind while he talked, and he treated me like a competent human being. That is why I loved him. (66)

Thus, she minimized the pain he valorized and gave him credit for the relief.

Twain was uniquely able to relieve Helen Keller’s pain because he understood it so well. He empathized with her suffering in a way that few people did. Keller wrote to Twain, “To know what the blind man needs, you who can see must imagine what it would be not to see, and you can imagine it more vividly if you remember that before your journey’s end you may have to go the dark way yourself” (A1 466). It was easy for Twain to locate a darkness in himself that mirrored Keller’s physical blindness. To be blind, wrote Keller, “is to live long, long days, and life is made up of days” (466). Twain’s long, long days may have been filled with physical

light, but he knew the darkness, as well. It was from the darkness that some of his greatest creativity sprang.

As she did with every other gesture of kindness and pity, Helen Keller returned Twain's empathy fully. She saw Twain's pain and reached out to soothe it. She regarded his suffering as equal to her own. To Twain, this was a kind of gift and a marvel. Whatever he did, he could not repay her kindness fast enough. She remained a moral hero—always providing more comfort than she received and impervious to the honors and rewards he tried to lavish upon her. Faithfully, she reached out to him, trying to show him that they were on the same level after all. After Livy died, Helen sent a letter to Twain. In it, she drew a parallel between the obscurity of blindness and sorrow: "Do not try to reach through grief and feel the pressure of her hand, as I reach through darkness and feel the smile on my friends' lips and the light in their eyes though mine are closed" (qtd. in Clemens 257). Although she didn't fully recognize how precisely Twain tracked pain and pleasure, Keller had always been aware of Twain's connection to pain.

Perhaps my strongest impression of him was that of sorrow. There was about him the air of one who had suffered greatly. Whenever I touched his face his expression was sad, even when he was telling a funny story. He smiled, not with the mouth but with his mind—a gesture of the soul rather than of the face. (Keller 66)

Keller seemed to have an implicit understanding of how Mark Twain related to pain, how it fed his humor and dwelt in his soul. She returned pleasure for pleasure and put his pain on par with hers. Twain would selectively ignore her efforts at

equalizing, however, and raise her to the highest level of moral heroism. He put her in the company with his most revered fictional characters: Eve and Joan of Arc.

During Keller's Stormfield visit, the company spent an evening with Twain reading aloud from *Eve's Diary*. Helen sat next to him, reading from his lips and face. When they reached Adam's Eulogy for Eve, Keller reports, "Every one of us felt the yearning homesickness in that cry of passion" (Keller 66). But Helen had a special connection to Eve. Sheldon and others explain that Twain borrowed from Keller's first autobiography, *The Story of My Life*, when he wrote the scenes of Eve's naming all the things she encounters in the new world. He saw in her experience the unabated joy of discovery and loaned it to his Edenic beauty, the primal incarnation of Livy, Eve. It was the highest honor he could afford her.

Twain returns to the idea of Helen Keller as Eve repeatedly. "Helen was a lump of clay, another Adam—deaf, dumb, blind, inert, dull, groping, almost unsentient," he says (A2 374). He gives Anne Sullivan the role of God, bringing the gift of life and light into the darkness. Like Eve, Helen is Adam's superior, intellectually. "Adam began his career without an intellect," Twain quips, "and there is no evidence that he ever acquired one. She was born with a fine mind and a bright wit" (A2 374). Twain develops the comparison to Eve when reflecting on how Helen matured from an innocent child to woman, fully engaged in the world of pain. During her visit to Stormfield, Twain observes that as a child, Helen had lived in a kind of Eden. "[A]ll soiling and sorrowful and unpleasant things had been carefully kept from her. The word death was not in her vocabulary, nor the word grave" (375).

At last, she has emerged from her “half world, a moon with only its bright and beautiful side presented to her, and its dark and repulsive side concealed from her. . . . I am sure she has lost that gracious world, and now inhabits the one we all know—and deplore” (375). Helen herself embraced the comparison and, on leaving Stormfield, signed the guestbook “A daughter of Eve, Helen Keller” (Shelden 315).

Twain also saw his beloved Joan of Arc in Keller. Twain called Helen “the most marvelous person of her sex that has existed on this earth since Joan of Arc” (*A1* notes 531). The association between the two women was ever-present for Twain. Both were humble, abused by fortune, and genuinely good—moral champions within his pain economy. Twain takes up one of Keller’s letters, “written by a young woman who has been stone deaf, dumb, and blind ever since she was eighteen months old, and who is one of the most widely and thorough educated women in the world,” and declares of it,

[H]ere was a fine and great and noble sample of [literature]; that this letter was simple, direct, unadorned, unaffected, unpretentious, and was moving and beautiful and eloquent; that no fellow to it had ever issued from any girl’s lips since Joan of Arc, that immortal child of seventeen, stood alone and friendless in her chains, five centuries ago, and confronted her judges . . . answering them out of her great heart and her untaught but marvelous mind. (*A1* 466)

Twain frequently overstates the importance of his heroes in the scope of world history and as literary figures. But his devotion to them is sincere and uncomplicated. He tallies up their earnings in the pain economy with a sense of approval rarely found elsewhere in his writing and plans for their reward in the hearts and minds of all generations of humankind.

Joan of Arc

“All the rules fail in this girl’s case,” Mark Twain wrote of his darling Joan of Arc (“Saint Joan” 593). Joan of Arc—a diminutive girl, gentle even in her military power, dedicated to the welfare of others, and the object of unthinkable physical suffering—was a specimen of total moral perfection. Her heart was so pure, her suffering so profound, that Twain could not help but worship. Her credits in the pain economy are astronomical. Everything she did was to benefit her country and her king, never herself. Whatever glory she earned along the way was wholly unsought and, ultimately, could not save her from a humiliating and terrible death. Within Twain’s pain economy, she was flawless. Since she was a literary figure, bound by Twain’s control on the page, she was unable to rebalance the scales in the way Helen Keller did. Of all Twain’s moral heroes, she is the purest. Perhaps for this reason, she is also the least compelling for Twain’s readers. Her perfection is so distant and so static that it lacks the dynamic tension of one actively engaged in the give and take of pleasure and pain. Twain’s hagiography, *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*,²⁸ attempts to lavish her with the glory he thought she deserved. There is nothing for us to do except observe; we have nowhere to invest.

Because *Joan of Arc* was written in a time when the Clemens family was facing financial ruin, says Resa Willis, the book represents their sorrow. Willis describes the family’s reaction when reading Joan’s execution scene together, “They

²⁸ Notice the title’s syntactical similarity to *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*.

all cried, but they were weeping for more than the death of a martyr" (221). It is an attractive interpretation—the family seeing themselves as martyrs to their misfortune. Certainly Twain would have grasped at any connection between himself and the Maid of Orleans, but he would not have raised their suffering to the same level. He was reluctant to even put his name on her book. The ostensible author is the Sieur Louis de Conte (significantly initialed S. L. C.), and even the 'translator' is named Jean François Alden rather than Mark Twain. The choice to leave the name "Mark Twain" off of the book, says James Cox, represents an intentional break with humor writing (247). "I did not want the authorship to be known, because I did not wish to swindle the public," explains Twain (42 353). A book by Mark Twain promised to be humorous, and he had no intention of being funny in this book. Twain didn't entirely leave humor writing behind, however. There are certain familiar humorous elements—the Paladin's self-blind bluster, biting ridicule of the Catholic priests, one utterly pointless ghost story, the bumbling of Joan's fellow commanders as they get used to following the orders of a country girl, etc.—that made it possible for readers to identify the work as Twain's even without his name attached. Nevertheless, the general consensus is that the book is not very funny, nor is it very good; it is too long, too repetitive, too devoted to glorifying its subject. Louis J. Budd argues that, although *Joan of Arc* is unremarkable as either biography or literature, Twain was satisfied just to have written it. "Bowed down in homage Twain merged with the crowd; for the time being this was a relief if not a deliberate escape" (*Social Philosopher* 166). I would add that Twain was happy to make

sacrifices for his heroes, when he could. If he lost some portion of his prestige or fame as an author because he wrote about Joan of Arc, it was a price he was duty-bound to pay.

Twain's work in *Joan of Arc* is to define and defend the perfect hero within the pain economy. Twain puts a great deal of effort into developing Joan's character as a moral saint, not a politician or a religious pawn. Joe B. Fulton points out that Joan's connection to the fairy powers, which is Twain's addition to the story, disassociates her from the Catholic church (114). By using the fairytale motif, Twain can respect and honor Joan without authenticating her visions, which are profoundly religious (Fulton 118). Joan's purity goes beyond piety, and Twain needs to show her as more than a religious figure. He makes sure that his readers know that the real Joan of Arc possessed these heroic qualities, and that he did not merely invent them for her. In his 1904 essay, "Saint Joan of Arc," Twain claims that Joan's personality and her military career are so extreme that they are not believable as anything but historical fact. He writes of her character as "one to be reverently studied, loved, and marveled at, and not to be wholly understood and accounted for by even the most searching analysis" ("Saint Joan" 584). This is his mission and his duty as her faithful admirer and biographer. Her character is a holy thing to him, one which he dare not pollute with invention or bind too closely to human institutions. In Twain's eyes, she attains perfection within *any* moral system.

Twain is forced to admit that Joan is, on some level, a political figure. Acknowledging this, he sets out to make her the very best political figure possible.

He is willing to let others stand in as symbols for “Love, Mercy, Charity, Fortitude, War, Peace, Poetry, Music” but Joan holds one spot all her own: “a slender girl in her first young bloom, with the martyr’s crown upon her head, and in her hand the sword that severed her country’s bonds—shall not this, and no other, stand for PATRIOTISM through all the ages until time shall end?” (*PRJA* 970). Twain’s general relationship with patriotism is uneasy at best. In his notebook, he records the evolution of patriotism from brave rebellion to mob consensus. “The soul and substance of what customarily ranks as patriotism is moral cowardice and always has been” (*MT’s Notebook* 394). But when he gives the title of ‘Patriot’ to Joan, the term is redefined by *her* virtues. “Joan is the materialization of love of *patrie*, the fatherland,” writes Randall Knoper, “and the perfect such embodiment because of her pure and selfless daughter-love” (9-10). This is a patriotism charged with the pure love between father and daughter—the kind of love Twain sometimes fantasized for himself and Susy but often worried he had failed to deliver or evoke.

On a national scale, Twain tunes Joan’s political power to his liking. Joan, Knoper tells us, is an American hero—and therefore Twain’s—as much as she is Conte’s French champion. The French citizens who adore Joan as their national savior (in spite of her outward conflict with the voices of authority) are presented in nineteenth-century modes, “joined horizontally by national identity rather than vertically by authority of the crown” (Knoper 10). The patriotism that Twain idealizes in her is democratic and, paradoxically, anti-monarchic. She honors the king because his return to the throne is necessary to the wellbeing of her

countrymen. Regarding his person, she is often frustrated and disappointed. Twain explicitly states that her heroism transcends time. Unlike other people, whose character may be good in their time and shameful in ours, Joan of Arc's character "can be measured by the standards of all time without misgiving or apprehension as to the result. . . . [I]t still occupies the loftiest place possible to human attainment, a loftier one than has been reached by any other mere mortal" (*PRJA* 545). She serves a timeless measure of morality—seeing the suffering of her countrymen, she strives to rebalance the scales and relieve their pain. If the monarchy had opposed this end, we might assume, Joan would not have hesitated to brush it aside.

Further evidence of Twain's Americanizing Joan of Arc appears in her relationship to the Catholic Church. Fulton discusses how, in Twain's *Personal Recollections*, Joan demonstrates a Protestant worldview. For example, she teaches the hardened general La Hire to pray, not according to a prescribed form, but from his heart. Joan "has made La Hire a Protestant," argues Fulton (124). Moreover, Joan's visions throw a wrench into the regular order of Catholic hierarchy, going over the heads of her priests to access the voice of God directly. Twain's storytelling, says Fulton, amplifies the dissonance between Joan and her cherished Catholicism. "Returning to the folk roots of fairy tale, epic, and hagiography allows Twain to remove hagiography from the purview of the Catholic hierarchy that he rejects throughout his career" (138-39). Joan is so disruptive within the established order that she even violates Twain's (or perhaps they are only Fulton's) narrative forms—in the fairytale, good does not prevail; in the hagiography, no one is sainted; in the

epic, her military efforts are thwarted, again and again (Fulton 136). Once again, Joan stands at a distance, unfettered by conventions.

Despite his dislike of the Catholic Church, Mark Twain fully accepted Joan's sainthood.²⁹ It was of paramount importance to Twain, says Fulton. "Twain's *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* should not be rejected as hagiography; it ought to be rigorously analyzed as hagiography" (Fulton 108). But his worship of her ultimately elevates her beyond mere sainthood to divine status. Twain's daughter Susy—whom many scholars suggest as a model for Joan—wrote to her friend, Louise, "The character of Joan is pure and perfect to a miraculous degree" (qtd. in Willis 197). The family loved the book, praising the author for his faithful service to such a worthy subject. The book itself contains endless references to Joan's holiness. "To us she was divine," writes Conte of his childhood friend. "Between her and us lay the bridgeless abyss which that word implies" (*PRJA* 811). Earlier in the book, Conte puts her as second only to Christ, claiming hers as "the most noble life that was ever born into this world save only One" (554). Conte's metaphor for her service to France erases even that distinction: "[S]he laid her hand upon this nation, this corpse, and it rose and followed her" (546). She almost slips away entirely from the embarrassments of her race. She is barely human: "[S]he was not made of common clay, . . . she was built on a grander plan than the mass of mankind, and moved on a loftier plane" (647). She hovers between Heaven and earth, only released from the latter by the rejection of her own people.

²⁹ Joan of Arc had not yet been sainted at the time that Twain wrote his book, but there were popular efforts to have her canonized ongoing at the time.

To be a proper hero, however, Twain needs Joan to be human. Without this greatest of challenges, her moral achievements are a mere matter of fact. The angels and the animals, lacking Moral Sense, are unable to sin. It is no credit to them that they do not do so. It is important, therefore, that Twain outline her affiliation explicitly: “[S]he is easily and by far the most extraordinary person *the human race* has ever produced” (“Saint Joan” 596, emphasis added). In light of her humanity, her morality is all the more spectacular. She is uniquely unselfish—the only one in the history of mankind (*PRJA* 546). But her humanity, of course, is unique. Unlike the other children in her village, she finds no horrified pleasure in staring at the body of a man who has been violently killed (589). Unlike Twain, she does not have the semi-masochistic ability to derive pleasure from her pain. Without this particular human trait, her willingness to suffer takes on a whole new importance. She does not know how to turn a profit on her pain—it is pure suffering.

The suffering of Joan of Arc, a beatified martyr, is an essential part of her moral character. Joan’s suffering would mean very little, however, if Joan deserved any of it. Although certain observers in Joan’s story have their doubt about her, neither Twain nor Joan sees her actions as anything other than righteous. Cox draws a comparison between Joan and Huck as “bad” children. Each is violating the rules of society, but only Huck knows it and accepts badness as part of his identity. “Joan is never a bad girl in her own eyes, but the good girl consciously doing the worthy bidding of her voices” (Cox 262). Twain, through the lens of Joan’s old friend and narrator, Conte, sustains her self-image. Every seeming cruelty (inevitable for a war

hero) is eventually explained away, and not a single accusation remains unanswered. Twain's Joan does not have even the slightest shadow self-doubt over her spiritual purpose, and no such doubt is allowed to enter his readers' minds, either. Joan of Arc's purpose, as with everything else about her, is pure.

In "Saint Joan of Arc," Twain makes much of her disadvantages and ignorance, especially when she is faced with the combined powers of church and state. In *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*, he likewise focuses on her as a poor, uneducated girl forced to speak to kings and seek out battle. It is proof of her superiority. Twain-as-Conte keeps track of the injustices done to Joan with an accountant's precision. Observing her kneeling before the king, Conte objects,

What had that man done for his country or for anybody in it, that she or any other person should kneel to him? But she—she had just done the only great deed that had been done for France in fifty years, and had consecrated it with the libation of her blood. The positions should have been reversed. (*PRJA* 745)

Twain watches with a mixture of regret and admiration as the pain is heaped onto Joan's account. Even the acts that could easily be seen as harmful to others—her military campaigns—are matched to old acts of English aggression towards France and her people so that she cannot be blamed for unwarranted aggression. In "Saint Joan of Arc," Twain meticulously lists all of the pain inflicted on Joan during her trial and contrasts it with "her granite fortitude" (590). The author *must* keep track, because Joan is blind to her own sufferings. "[T]he only way to rouse her up and set her on fire was to show her where some *other* person was going to suffer wrong or

hurt or loss" (*PRJA* 568). She is a flawless martyr and moral hero. She is ignorant of her own pain until she finds that she can offer it as a gift.

The pleasure she provides to those around her is as pure as her suffering. The simple declaration of Joan's purpose inspires hope in the downtrodden—the people of France flock to her before she has done a thing to help them in their plight. Her very person exudes moral rectitude, healing, and pleasure. Her power to set the world right was ingrained into her very body:

Joan's eyes were deep and rich and wonderful beyond anything merely earthly. They spoke all the languages—they had no need of words. They produced all effects—and just by a glance, just a single glance: a glance that could convict a liar of his lie and make him confess it; that could bring down a proud man's pride and make him humble; that could put courage into a coward and strike dead the courage of the bravest; that could appease resentments and real hatreds; that could speak peace to storms of passion and be obeyed; that could make the doubter believe and the hopeless hope again . . . (*PRJA* 698-99)

A creature borne straight from the heart of Twain's moral imagination, Joan has almost no flaws and no limit to her power.

Twain had personal relationships with all of the heroes of this chapter except for Joan of Arc; she existed, for him, solely on the page. Thus, Twain as author has the power to control how dramatic the pain imbalance is for Joan—and he can make her perfect. He pulls out all the stops. She is morally unassailable, both by the standards of conventional morality and within his own pain economy. That is not to say that Twain allows the purveyors of conventional morality any latitude because of their association with Joan. As Cox points out, Twain's open contempt for the

church drives him to paint them in the worst light possible—as ruthless abusers of a powerless girl (261). Finally exonerating her even in the eyes of the church, Twain makes sure that Joan is faultless by *all* moral measures. This arrangement accomplishes two things in the pain economy: it increases the sin of the abusive priests, and it moves Joan further into her role as righteous sufferer. Twain is utterly committed to this gross imbalance in Joan’s favor, and she—as his character—must comply. Joan defends herself, but she cannot really offend; it is beyond the scope of her nature, as painted by Twain. Her persecutors are not given anything to fear from Twain’s Joan of Arc, so their attacks seem all the more heinous. Twain describes Joan’s trial as “a kennel of mastiffs and blood-hounds harassing a kitten” (*PRJA* 866). In the face of injury, abuse, and abandonment, Mark Twain’s Joan of Arc is bound to her role as submissive pain-recipient. It is the law of her creation. Conte may rail against France for failing to ransom Joan, but she must remain silent, even when betrayed by her own people: “And she—what did she say? Nothing. Not a reproach passed her lips. She was too great for that—she was Joan of Arc; and when that is said, all is said” (841).

Twain’s devotion to Joan of Arc was nothing short of absolute worship. But she was not his only hero, nor—in the grand scheme of things—his most important one. One evening, as the family sat around listening to Twain read from *Joan of Arc*, someone remarked that her father “loves two women—Mamma in the present, and Joan retrospectively” (Clemens 127). Despite Joan’s perfection as a moral hero, she was relegated to the past. Everything Twain knew about her was second-hand

information. With Livy, it was different. Twain had a front row seat to Livy's perfection for more than thirty years, and in all that time her status as moral hero never once came into question.

Livy Langdon Clemens (Eve)

The comparison between Livy and Joan of Arc is apt. Of all of Mark Twain's heroes, only these two generated such complete reverence. On Ulysses S. Grant and Helen Keller Twain bestowed honor and timeless glory. For Joan and Livy, he was prepared to lay down his very soul. Not even Joan of Arc, however, won from Twain the total religious devotion that Livy did. Livy was living proof that the curse of the Moral Sense was not enough to destroy goodness in all people. Through daily self-sacrifice and patient suffering, she built up so great a wealth of pain and provided so much unremunerated pleasure that she stands as the foremost moral hero of the pain economy.

Livy's pain, her generosity, and her morality were of great personal significance to Twain. Her suffering meant the most to him because he felt personally responsible for most of it. Her generous and long-suffering spirit was holy to him, and he benefitted from her presence in his life every day. Twain invests, in her name, in all kinds of pain—physical, emotional, financial. Every pang she suffers is amplified by her love for him, her husband. Through his sins, she is glorified.

Eve, as the first wife and mother, bears a strong resemblance to Livy, and I will discuss the two figures in tandem. Eve exists on the page; she is Mark Twain's creation, an embodiment of his most revered moral hero. Although Livy was a real person, her relationship to Mark Twain exists, for us, largely within the pages of his writing. Like General Grant, this Livy-of-the-page, was written in large part by her husband and worshipper. As a joint figure, the Livy-Eve character attains a hero's status more secure than any individual could hope for.

Twain felt a special connection to Adam and Eve, their life in Eden, and their expulsion from Paradise. Twain even claims Adam as "the first Clemens" (A1 349). Although Twain would not publish any of his Edenic musings for many years, as a young husband he was already starting to think about antediluvian civilization in connection with Livy. Her insistence on daily prayers and Bible readings connected her, in Twain's mind, to the narrative possibilities provided by Genesis (Kaplan 119). Like her counterpart in Eden, Livy would not be permitted to stay in the religious idyll of her early marriage. She came to a sobering realization about her lost faith one Sunday morning in Hartford. Sitting alone in the Asylum Hill Congregational Church (her husband was away on business), Livy listened guiltily to Joseph Twichell pray for those who had "fallen away" from God; his prayer brought her to tears. Later she wrote to her husband, addressing him by his pet name, "Youth I am ashamed to go back, because I have fallen away so many times and gone back feeling that if I ever should grow cold again, it would be useless trying . . ." (LL 167). Losing her once-strong faith felt like a total violation, especially to a passionate woman like

Livy. But it was not just the fact that she had lost her faith. Livy still had faith as well as a passionate, trusting love—only not for God. “[I]f I felt toward God as I did toward my husband I should never be in the least troubled,” she wrote (*LL* 168). In his many retellings of the Fall of Man, Twain often ascribes noble, loving sentiment to Eve’s “sin” of eating the forbidden fruit. She literally falls *for* Adam, to save or please him.

Both in Twain’s Eden and in the Clemenses’s personal life, the Fall turned out to be less of a disaster than they might have supposed. In a small way, they cheated God’s moral law and brought Eden with them. The loss of paradise might cause pain, but pain is capital. Pain is the doorway to a dynamic, fulfilling life. Too often, Twain believed, Livy took on all the pain while he received the pleasure, but their happiness together was real. In “Extracts from Adam’s Diary,” written in 1892, Twain has Adam—who had at first resented the intrusion of Eve into his peaceful garden—reflect favorably on the loss of Eden:

After all these years, I see that I was mistaken about Eve in the beginning; it is better to live outside the Garden with her than inside it without her. At first I thought she talked too much; but now I should be sorry to have that voice fall silent and pass out of my life. Blessed be the sorrow that brought us near together and taught me to know the goodness of her heart and the sweetness of her spirit! (*BA* 16)

These are the closing words of “Adam’s Diary.” Adam (and Twain) seem content in the knowledge that the path to love and partnership is pain and sorrow. These are far better than the empty promises of a religious paradise. The sentiments in this passage anticipate Adam’s much-quoted words on Eve’s grave marker that close

“Eve’s Diary.” After their troubled romance, their loss of Eden, their agony over Abel’s murder, and the long years of their pain-ridden life, Adam’s final words for his wife are simple and profound: “Wheresoever she was, *there* was Eden” (BA 33). It is almost universally acknowledged that these words were written for Livy.

Examining the Livy-Eve character within Twain’s writing, we must remember that what we are seeing, though based on a real person, is a literary creation. Our view of the character is shaded by Twain’s beliefs about women. Influenced, perhaps, by Victorian social standards, Twain expected decent women to embody the virtues of modesty, self-sacrifice, and morality. As a young man, his idea of women lacked nuance—he admired them as a unit rather than as individuals. In his 1868 speech, “Woman—An Opinion,” Twain generally declares of woman: “she is a brick” (247). He calls her “an ornament” and “a treasure” and lists, among her defining characteristics an alternately harmless and handy collection of activities: domestic duties, gossip, moral guidance, nagging, comfort, and motherhood. Twain had not yet met Livy when he delivered this speech.

As the daughter of wealthy parents, Livy had plenty of time to internalize the norms of Victorian womanhood before she met her husband, but his praise of her domesticity, timidity, and self-abnegation certainly helped to shape the person she would become in adulthood. No matter what she did, her nature—at least in her young suitor’s eyes—was to bring benefit to others. She was the impossible human creature—a moral hero—in the flesh. His choice to view her thus affected their entire relationship. Willis notes that Twain’s total worship of his wife makes her

seem like a caricature of goodness: “The Livy addressed by Clemens in his love letters during their year of engagement seems too good for this world, but then that is the way he wanted to see her. The traits attributed to her were real, but carried to an adoring extreme” (45). The fact is that almost everyone who knew Livy remembered her with the same loving, humble, dignified personality Twain writes of in his letters. Clara Clemens writes of her mother,

Her great sensitiveness was not of the type that demanded attention for herself. On the contrary, it spent itself keenly understanding the needs and wishes of others. This is more remarkable because physically she was delicate, suffering frequent illnesses that robbed her of the limited strength she possessed at best. (Clemens 25)

To others, however, Livy was merely a woman. To Twain, she was the womanly ideal, a moral model—and the only one of her kind.

Twain’s virtuous woman views the world with a child-like naiveté. However infantilizing such a view of women may be, Twain adored Livy’s (and Eve’s) innocence, and he did what he could to preserve the image of it. In the case of Livy, Twain took proactive steps to preserve her innocence. In one of his courtship letters, he begs her to let him bowdlerize *Don Quixote* for her before she reads it. “You are as pure as snow, & I would have you always so—untainted untouched even by the impure thoughts of others” (LL 76). It was important to Twain that Livy (as she existed within his love letters, anyway) be immune to the slightest of human failings. As he writes about her, she—like Joan of Arc—is barely human. Looking at a picture of his beloved, Twain writes, “There is that deep spiritual look in the eyes—that far-away look that I have noted before when I wondered in my secret heart if you were

not communing with the inhabitants of another sphere, a grander, a nobler would than ours" (Clemens 20).

Undoubtedly, throughout their life together, Livy gave her husband examples of her less-than-perfect human nature that might have convinced a less committed author to revise his character portrait. But Twain employed every ounce of narrative craft to preserving the image he cherished. His dedication is obvious in the Edenic writings. He allows Eve to feel the impulse to larceny (she would steal the moon if she could, she confesses), but he shrugs off her moral deviance as something sweet, springing from her untainted goodness. Eve explains her desire for the moon this way: "the core and centre of my nature is love of the beautiful, a passion for the beautiful" (*BA* 21). Twain willingly accepts the newborn woman's explanation, pats her on the head, and sends her back to her innocent play.

It was a paradoxical condescension, because Twain idolized his goodhearted woman, even as he indulged her. In his letters to Livy, Twain describes, over and over, his perception of her transcendent nature, always placing himself as her inferior. "I am notorious, but you are great," he wrote to Livy, "that is the difference between *us*" (*LL* 268). He took every opportunity, especially in moments of crisis, to emphasize the distance between her goodness and his wickedness. In the last tense days before the final news of Susy's death, Twain wrote to his wife, "Livy darling, you are so good & dear & steadfast & fine—the highest & finest & loveliest character I have ever known; & I was never worthy of you. You should have been the prize of a better man—a man up nearer your own level" (*LL* 318-19). No one doubts that

Twain loved his wife, but his words create an insurmountable distance between them. There must have been times when the hero's pedestal felt awfully lonely to Livy.

Livy, however, was not one to complain—at least, the Livy of the page was uncomplaining. Her worries were centered on the wellbeing of others. Early in their romance, Twain wrote to her with reassuring words, responding, presumably, to her claim that she felt she was ever in danger of forgetting her duty to those around her. “No, Livy, Livy, Livy,” he exclaimed, “I *can't* see that you are in constant danger of pursuing your own tastes & pleasures instead of giving up your life for others. What I *do* see, though, is that you are always sacrificing yourself for other peoples' benefit. I *know* it, Livy” (LL 71). This passage is especially significant because it shows that, unlike the self-sacrificers of “What Is Man?” who do what they do in order to gain self-approval, Livy struggled to believe that she had ever done enough.

It was important to Mark Twain that this story of Livy's personality find a public platform. In a widely reprinted *Christian Union* article (quoted here from the *Kansas City Evening Star*), Twain describes his home life with candid openness. In the article, he describes how Livy disciplined the Clemens girls. He details their use of physical punishment, such as spanking, as a teaching tool, not an act of revenge. The child being punished, he points out, was always comforted by her mother after being disciplined. According to Twain, the children's spankings hurt the mother, who was incapable of entering the situation in anger, as much as they hurt the girls:

“Every blow she strikes the child bruises her own heart” (“Mark Twain’s Wife”). In the article, Livy appears to have reached the height of Victorian motherhood:

[The children] know her for the best and truest friend they have ever had, or ever shall have; they know her for one who never did them any wrong, and can not do them a wrong; who never told them a lie, nor the shadow of one; who never deceived them by even an ambiguous gesture, who never gave them an unreasonable command, nor ever contented herself with anything short of a perfect obedience; who has always treated them as politely and considerately as she would the best and oldest in the land, and has always required of them gentle speech and courteous conduct toward all, of whatever degree, with whom they chanced to come in contact; they know her for one whose promise, whether of reward or punishment, is gold, and always worth its face to the uttermost farthing.

At the end of the article, Twain admits that, contrary to custom, he did not allow Livy to read or edit this particular piece, knowing she would toss the manuscript into the fire to prevent it going to print. Indeed, the publication of the article felt, to Livy, like an invasion of privacy, and she regretted her husband’s choice to write it (Willis 164). But for Twain, it was necessary to put in print the kind of mother he knew Livy to be.

Twain constantly compared his parenting to Livy’s. He felt as vastly inferior to her on this front as on any other. Twain dramatized the difference in their parenting abilities via Adam and Eve.³⁰ When Cain and Abel are born, Eve immediately loves her little cubs and protects them instinctively. Adam, on the other hand, nearly kills them with his impatience at their uselessness and his crude

³⁰ See the Edenic writings in *The Bible According to Mark Twain*, eds. Baetzhöld and McCullough.

misunderstanding of their nature (he is uncertain whether they are fish, bears, or kangaroos). When Twain writes about his real-life family, the dynamic is much the same. Whereas Livy gave of herself endlessly, Twain couldn't be bothered to attend to his children's desires if he had something else going on. Twain blamed the death of their first child, Langdon, on his carelessness—he let the blankets slip off the boy on a chilly day. When Susy died, Twain castigated himself for his failure as a father, while admitting that his nature would not allow him to act any differently, even if he had it to do over again. He wrote of his sorrows to Livy:

If I could call up a single instance where I laid aside my own projects & desires & put myself to real inconvenience to procure a pleasure for her I would forget all things else to remember that. How *you* gave your whole self to her! how you thought for her, planned for her, worked for her, lavished your capital of physical and mental strength upon her; & did it with such loving interest in it. Oh, yes, and resumed the service again & again, when it had apparently failed of its due reward. You were the best friend she ever had, dear heart, & the steadfastest. Keep the thought of it in mind, & get from it the solace you have earned, dear Livy. (*LL* 326-27)

Mark Twain's morality, which values pain and charges for pleasure, honored Livy for her sacrifice. He notes that she accepts pain without complaint and works always for the good of others. In his letter, he attempts to reward her for her moral triumph, but his words of praise were likely small comfort to the grieving mother.

But he was right about her. Even in the aftermath of her daughter's death Livy did not break from her habits of selfless care for others. Clara remembers her mother, in the midst of her grief, concerned with the wellbeing of those around her, caring for those who were supposed to be caring for her (Clemens 171). She had put

years into developing these patterns of self-denial, and they were difficult to escape. She continued to follow them, even when any real need for them had past. After years of financial struggle, the family was finally out of debt, but Livy clung to her habits of self-sacrifice, skipping treatments at the sanatorium in Sweden, even though they had traveled there for the sole purpose of her taking them (Willis 252). Whether he meant to or not, Twain put the full weight of his mental health on her shoulders. In a moment of terrible family stress, Twain wrote to Livy of his dependence on her: “But I’m doing my best, dear heart—& you are my stay & my courage. Without you I should be nothing” (LL 275). He created a hero’s role for her, and he wrote her into it.

It little matters whether Livy acted as she did out of sheer force of habit—some kind of submission to the expectations placed on her by her gender and social status—or in response to a deep moral urging. It does not even matter if her practice of self-sacrifice was always helpful to those around her. To her husband—who counted any pain as credit—when Livy denied herself any pleasure, when she suffered without complaint, she became a moral hero to him. As is the case with Twain’s other moral heroes, Livy’s physical pain was sacred to Twain. He honored her for her bodily suffering throughout her life. After Livy’s death, Twain wrote of her, “[S]he was so lovely, so patient—never a murmur at her hard fate; yet—but I *can’t* put her sufferings on paper, it breaks any heart to think of them” (LL 348). Her frail body provided yet one more opportunity for her to prove her selflessness.

Twain did not need to create Livy's physical suffering narrative from scratch. She had occupied the invalid's chair for years before she met him. When she was still a girl, Livy was diagnosed with a disorder variously referred to as "nervous prostration or exhaustion, hysteria, neurasthenia" (Willis 24)—after she suffered a bad fall. The Langdons were prepared for the worst, thinking their daughter would never walk again, let alone marry and bear children. Even when Livy eventually did leave her parents' house to become Mrs. Clemens, she brought her reputation for frailty with her. It was almost the only way she knew how to be. "Illness," writes Willis, "made Livy the center of the family's attention, as it would later do so when she was a married woman and mother" (27). Twain watched his wife's health carefully, often chastising her for getting out of bed too soon if she had been ill. At times, accounts of their family life read like a hospital log, with various family members confined to bed with illness for weeks or months at a time. Quite often, the patient is Livy. When Livy died in 1904, Twain remarked that her passing signaled the end of "22 months of unjust and unearned suffering" (Willis 277). He might just as easily have said "58 years."

Twain's tone towards Livy had been reverential from the beginning of their courtship. Even while he was trying to convince Livy Langdon that he could be a good Christian, his letters are full of implications that she will be his only true religion. He prays, but he prays to her, asking her to love him: "Some of my other prayers have seemed only faint-hearted words, words, words compared to this, which came surging up out of my heart—a great tide of feeling which scorned set

phrase and tricks of speech, and prayed itself" (Clemens 13). After wresting a guarded confession of love from his darling, Twain erupts with pent-up worship: "I have no fears—none. I believe in you, even as I believe in the Savior in whose hands our destinies are. I have faith in you" (*LL* 25). He is both sacrilegious and unashamed. He is like Adam, redefining paradise from a sinless, painless state of obedience to a fallen state, now living with sorrow but his eyes finally opened to the treasure of his wife.

Livy was an idol to her husband—Cox calls it his "heresy" (73)—she possessed the power of salvation in his mind (Cox 72). Her pain secured his worship. Writing to a friend after her death, Twain said of his feelings for Livy, "Our love for her was the ordinary love, but added to it was a reverent & quite conscious worship. Perhaps it was nearly like a subject's feeling for his sovereign—a something which he does not have to reason out, or nurse, or study about, but which comes natural" (*LL* 349). The problem with making your spouse your savior is that you cast yourself as the sinner and therefore responsible for the savior's suffering. It was a role quite familiar to Twain, and he watched with a sort of agonized pride and admiration as his wife absorbed his many offenses with barely a murmur. In the pain economy, as in life, Twain tended to be a spendthrift. Sometimes he even spent Livy's share. The pain that he caused Livy—and the pain he felt for doing it—was part of the story he told about their relationship. Writing in his notebook just after Livy's passing, Twain lamented, "I am full of remorse for things done and said in these thirty-four years of

married life that hurt Livy's heart" (Clemens 253). It was heart disease that had killed her. In his confession, he is literally accepting blame for her death.

Through loving Livy, Twain learned to go beyond the simplistic tit-for-tat of the pain economy. Suddenly, pain inflicted is pain shared. "I have known few meaner men than I am," Twain writes. "[T]his worst detail of my character has never been known to any but two persons—Mrs. Clemens, who suffered from it, and I, who suffer from the remembrance of the tears it caused her" (A1 436). Love is agonizing and rewarding in the same moment, making love a better alchemist, even, than humor. In the story "Which was the Dream?" the narrator praises his wife for leaving his pain alone, even when the opportunity presented itself to gloat over him. He did not return the favor:

In nine cases in ten, when Alice had a sore place, I hastened with an insane eagerness to bruise it, and grieve her heart—and yet I loved her so, and had such a deep reverence for her beautiful character. I hurried to bruise it, knowing, when I did it, that when I saw the wounded look in her eyes I should be blistered with remorse and shame, and would give anything if I had not done it. (242)

The narrator blames his inborn nature, an irresistible urge to do harm. What he does not mention but is apparent in this story also is the twin urge to wallow in the shame of his sins, counting and recounting the pain he gave to those he loved. On the surface, it almost looks as if Twain is more of a sadist than a masochist, given his incessant torturing of Livy, except that he seems to derive his pleasure, his meaning, from the torment *he* goes through because of his wrongdoing. He sins so that he can be punished for it. The suffering Twain experienced became his creative energy. The

suffering Livy experienced was her moral glory. There was no reason to change anything.

For Twain, the pattern of sinner-husband hurting savior-wife, in small ways and large ones, was established since the dawn of humanity. One of Eve's first reflections about Adam in "Eve's Diary" reads, "It has low tastes, and is not kind" (*BA* 22). He does not improve his reputation much after that point. The injury/acceptance dynamic is thus ancient, Biblical, mythic. Twain writes of Livy's tolerance for his naughty teasing, "[S]he is as long-suffering & patient as any Job" (*LL* 85). If Livy is Job in this scenario, then Twain is Satan, allowed by God to torment this righteous person. "I don't like to fool Livy this way," he confesses, "& I don't do it often, but sometimes her simplicity is so tempting I can't resist the inclination" (86). He is a man addicted to the pain exchange. He gladly receives the pleasure of tormenting her, but he also—as her lover—suffers to see her embarrassed of him or hurt by his actions. He was fond of torturing himself for all of Livy's pains, no matter how small or fictional. Thus, he could pursue his own pain through hurting Livy. She provided, among other things, a lively pain market for him. Twain's writing sparkles with his shame. He brings his guilt to Livy with a kind of wincing grin; he is both truly sorry and truly enjoying the energy stirred up by his self-reproach. A single remembered instance of hurting Livy suddenly snowballs into a much more dramatic episode:

Late last night I was smitten suddenly with shame & remorse in remembering how I forced you to drive through the thunder & lightning & rain that night that you were so frightened & wanted to stop at the Water Cure. I have remembered that brutality many a time,

& cursed myself for it. It is at times like these that I also visit with deep & honest curses the memory of those various people who plucked me from the water when I was a lad & drowning. (*LL* 272).

In his idle moments Twain remembered his sins against Livy, crediting most of the pain to her account, but paying himself a small fee for the effort.

Livy was hardly the unwilling victim, though she obviously suffered at her husband's hand. In response to Twain's promises to castigate himself after her death for the tears she cried, Livy told him that, if he died first, she would have nothing to regret so long as she did not love him "the less devotedly or the less constantly because of those tears" (*A1* 435). She, too, understood this constant game as part of their collective story, although at times it seems as if she wished for a simpler arrangement. His engagement with pain was painful to her—she claimed it left her feeling "crushed to the earth"—and although she saw how pain and anger played such an important part in her husband's work, she could not entirely understand why it was necessary. "Does it help the world to always rail at it?" she asked her husband bluntly (qtd. in Willis 264). For Twain, the measurement of pain, the condemnation of injustice, and the worship of sinless suffering was essential, but he could not fully explain it to his wife.

Instead, he retold their story through Adam and Eve. In Eve, he could embody Livy's pained love for her insensitive husband and wrestle with the question of why she stayed with him. A new mother, Eve finds utter delight in her child: "Life was become a bliss, a rapture, an ecstasy, and I longed, day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute for Adam to return and share my almost unendurable joy with me" (*BA*

60). He does come, but he is bothersome and hurtful. Twain bestowed on Eve the paradox of Livy's love: constant hope that that Adam will ease her sorrow and loneliness—which he does—and the constant realization that to love him is to suffer. Eve can't quite find a reason why she loves Adam. His singing curdles milk (though she still asks him to sing and learns to tolerate spoiled milk); his intellectual brilliance (or lack thereof) is God's doing, not his; he is not gracious or considerate; if he has any industriousness, he is hiding it well; self-educated, he believes his errors to be facts; his last shred of chivalry died the moment he blamed her for the Fall.

So what is it that makes her love him?

Merely because he is masculine, I think. . . . At bottom he is good, and I love him for that, but I could love him without it. If he should beat me and abuse me, I should go on loving him. I know it. It is a matter of sex, I think. . . . Yes, I think I love him merely because he is mine and is masculine. (BA 32)

This is a disagreeable passage for modern readers, as it may have been for Twain's contemporaries. It seems to romanticize domestic abuse, painting it as an expression of love. For decades already, women (and men) in the budding women's rights movement were preaching against the pressure on women to tolerate abuse as a wifely duty, here exemplified by Eve's mindset. Twain's explanation of Eve's willingness to suffer as "a matter of sex" is not satisfactory. The passage takes on a slightly different hue, however, when we read it specifically as part of Livy's personality, the personality Twain emphasized in all of his writing about her. The

above passage hearkens to a conversation Twain recorded in one of his pre-engagement letters to Livy:

It was just like Mr. Langdon in his most facetious mood, to say he would kill me if I wasn't good to you—& it was just like you, you dear true girl, to say you'd never tell—for I believe you *would* go bravely on, suffering in secret from ill treatment, till your great heart broke. (*LL* 53-54)

He swore to Livy's father, of course, that he would never hurt his daughter. But by Twain's own standards, he did not live up to his promise.³¹ Eve was Twain's way of trying to understand Livy. He bestows on his heroine a serene assurance that love, however agonizing, is a greater prize than a pain-free paradise ever was. "The Garden is lost," she admits, "but I have found *him*, and am content. He loves me as well as he can; I love him with all the strength of my passionate nature" (*BA* 31). Her willingness to participate in his confusing, unjust pain exchange is Eve's (and Livy's) way of trying to understand her husband.

Any discussion of the relationship between Livy Clemens and her husband's writing would not be complete without addressing the question of Livy's role as Twain's editor. Critics are widely divided on whether Livy functioned as a controlling force of propriety in Twain's life and writing or whether Livy-as-censor was a role he wrote for her and forced her into. Recently, the consensus seems to be that Twain was not likely to be controlled against his will, and that the sway of Livy's censorship has been exaggerated over the years. As with many marriages, it

³¹ This is merely to say that he felt that he had inflicted great pain on her through embarrassing behavior, insensitivity, and mismanagement of finances, not that he physically abused her.

proves a fruitless project to decipher who held power over whom. If we are going to argue that Twain would not be reformed against his will, then we must also admit that Livy couldn't be corrupted against hers. They cooperated with each other. She, the figurehead, he the clever politician, but both knew that their partnership was a benefit to both sides. Kenneth Andrews points out that, although both Livy and William D. Howells advocated that Twain craft a public reputation of gentility and "that he discipline his inclination to burlesque" into "a dignified literary personality," they were fairly lax in their enforcement of their agenda (189). Livy did not seem to think that her husband was doing anything wrong with his rascally humor, but she didn't want him to miss the chance to gain the public honor that she felt he deserved. Livy wrote of her husband, "I want the public . . . to know something of his deeper, larger nature—I remember being quite incensed by a lady's asking, 'Is there anything of Mr. Clemens except his humour?'" (Willis 43). She wanted to write his reputation to be larger, more expansive, not edit it down within narrow restrictions.

Livy's most important role as "reformer," at least in regards to the scholarly studies of Mark Twain, was as his first reader and the editor of his writings. Leland Krauth divides the character of Mark Twain when he describes his relationship to his wife: "[W]hile the prodigal self kept right on returning, never to arrive, Clemens's constant self made him at home in Olivia's love" (101). It seems true that Livy provided Twain with a steady presence, an unchanging and reliable touchstone in his life. But the lively exchange between them—riddled with pain and rife with pleasure—stimulated Twain's writing. Livy and Twain are inextricable from each

other; since Livy became part of Clemens, she also became a part of Twain, and her values are incorporated into his works (Krauth 102). Having chosen to love Livy, to honor her, even valorize her, for her moral bearing, we could argue that Livy's values were always Twain's—he simply did not possess the right character to express them in practice.

Willis dismisses the idea that Livy stifled her husband's creativity: "Of course not. It was all a game to him. He created a Livy to reform his life and a Livy to edit his work. He needed and wanted to be tamed" (xiii). Their editing arrangement provided a kind of Monopoly board for the pain economy—a low-stakes reenactment of a real-world exchange. Livy played up her pain at his indiscretions, Twain played up his at her censorship, and everyone enjoyed the show. The game began in the months of their courtship. For Cox, the love letters demonstrate a "play world" that Twain created with Livy. "She was, to use his own favorite term for her, his 'dear little gravity'—a kind of straight man who was to collaborate in the creation of his humor" (75). It was his humor, fueled by scenes of imbalanced pain, that made him who he was. She could not have loved him without playing his game sometimes, and her willing participation in the game allowed it to *be* a game. There was a more serious exchange of pain going on between Twain and Livy in other parts of their life, but the supposed offenses in his writing were very rarely charged with real pain.

Livy was uniquely suited to serve as Mark Twain's partner. She was intelligent enough to recognize his need for playing sinner and saint, and—for

better or for worse—she played along, even when the stakes were high and her cooperation costly. By nature and by training, she was inclined to accept her troubles without complaint and devote herself to the benefit of those around her. She may not have always understood why her husband was so drawn to the most painful parts of the human experience, why he punished himself for the slightest offense, but she did what she could to relieve his suffering. As a result, she came to define the moral hero for Mark Twain. Everything she did gained her more and more credit in the pain economy, until she was unfathomably rich in his eyes. There could never be another like her. When asked, after Livy's death, whether he intended to marry his secretary, Isabel Lyon, Twain responded with a simple written message: "I have not known, and shall never know, anyone who could fill the place of the wife I have lost. I shall not marry again. S.L. Clemens" (Shelden 132).

The difficulty of laughter

Mark Twain's identity as a writer is bound to laughter. It is difficult to laugh at the pure of heart, so a major part of Twain's character is muffled when he (or we) discusses his moral heroes. Freud argues that laughing at naïveté requires the laughter to engage the naïve person's mind empathetically (177). Unable to recognize humor themselves, naïve people are likely to offend through their simplicity. Twain worked hard to tease out the humor of his heroic subjects. So as to retain respect for his subjects, Twain ends up laughing more at himself and his readers than at the heroes themselves. The joke in the "Babies" speech, for instance,

hinges not on any actual likeness between Grant's accomplishments and a baby's but on the audacity of the speaker in making the comparison at all. The tension that Twain felt in the room released into laughter when he deftly turned the comparison of Grant to a mewling infant into a compliment. In *Joan of Arc*, Twain's humor centers on the humiliation of those around Joan who underestimate her power, her wit, or her purity and make fools of themselves as a result. Twain did not expect his moral heroes to get the jokes he made, though he was delighted when he succeeded in making them laugh. As Freud explains, those concerned with the correct behavior of a body or soul rarely find humor in deviations: "A gymnastics instructor or a dancing-master will rarely have an eye for the comedy of movement in his pupils, and the comedy of human weaknesses escapes the clergyman entirely" (212). Accustomed to quietly receiving pain and forgiving error, Twain's moral heroes are less inclined to find humor in the bustling exchange of pain and pleasure at play in Twain's humor writing.

Consequently, when Twain writes about his heroes, the result is generally unfunny, as well. We are trained, by Twain's other writing, to disbelieve his serious demeanor. Usually, Quirk says, when Twain breaks into profundity, sincerity, or sentimentality, he is betrayed by a quick return to humor and sarcasm, as if the sincerity was only there to stand in comic contrast (*MTHN* 56). Twain tells jokes on himself, not necessarily denying his sincere emotions but showing them to be ridiculous by increasingly absurd displays of hypocrisy. The essential part of a comic character is that, to some extent he or she is ignorant of a part of his or her

personality (Bergson 72). Twain most often plays his own comic character, and so his heartfelt bursts of seriousness become part of a comical self-blindness. In his devotion to the joke, he dispenses with any pretense to his own reputation.

With Twain's moral heroes, however, he is not willing to concede that they are self-blind or that he is deluded as to their sanctity. He will not play fast and loose with their reputations. Trained as we are to suspect Twain's serious-sounding assertions, it can be disappointing to read Twain's expressions of total admiration for one of his heroes. There is no other shoe to drop. He has taken off his shoes, believing himself to be on holy ground.

This kind of wholesale worship can be difficult to understand coming from Twain, who consistently questions the validity of unquestioned devotion. Twain's moral heroes disrupt, as I've stated above, his conception of the human race in general. Their exceptional moral standing, in some ways, is an ironic contrast to every other human being in existence. This is perhaps the best and only real joke found in Twain's writing about his heroes. Irony, writes Henri Bergson, pretends that the best action, being described by the speaker's words, is really taking place (63). For Twain, his heroes *are* real, and their example highlights the despicable nature of the rest of humanity. They are an ironical statement about the merits of humankind; Twain can safely trust that we get the joke, since we have not stopped living in the world and observing its people.

Irony is emphasised the higher we allow ourselves to be uplifted by the ideas of the good that ought to be, thus irony may grow so hot within us that it becomes a kind of high-pressure eloquence. On the other hand, humour is the more emphasised the deeper we go down

into an evil that actually is, in order to set down its details in the most cold-blooded indifference. (Bergson 63)

Twain plays both sides of this joke, though not always at the same time.

When Mark Twain writes about his heroes, it is with his whole heart. He sets them apart from the mass of humanity and worships them with total abandon. However, his attempts to unite his admiration for his heroes with humor are few and, frankly, a bit lackluster. Twain's best humor (at least to my tastes) takes place at the immoral end of the pain economy. Laughter, for Mark Twain, is usually a darker matter than he might wish to associate to his moral paragons. It is that kind of laughter that he recognized in a particular jackass bird that he encountered in Australia: "This one opened his head wide and laughed like a demon; or like a maniac who was consumed with humorous scorn over a cheap and degraded pun. It was a very human laugh" (*FE* 532). And by human, he means the rest of us.

CHAPTER FOUR: The Villains

In the last chapter, I discussed how Mark Twain establishes his moral heroes at one extreme of unbalance—these select few suffer without recompense, and their lives provide unmitigated benefit to others. Twain honored his heroes in his writing with reverential devotion. In this chapter, I will examine Twain's treatment of those at the other end of the spectrum—the ones who reap benefit from the suffering of others, who live in pleasure and send the bill to someone else. These are Twain's villains. Twain knew that, in the real world, moral violations of this kind often went unpunished. Rich men who build empires on the backs of the poor die rich and happy. Cruel and hypocritical imperialist rulers abuse their subjected peoples with total impunity. And God, who allows unimaginable pain to be visited upon his children, demands and receives praise from his victims. Working to right so great a pain inequity, Twain's writing becomes fully energized.

When writing about his heroes, Twain maintains a worshipful distance, but it is different with the villains. At times, Mark Twain sees himself as one of their number, and so when he punishes them, ridicules them, condemns them, he does it to himself as well. He allows himself into his stories, using his own life as a text to be analyzed and edited (Quirk, *MTHN* 222). He does not write of himself as a powerful person—heroic, every detail significant—but as a disciplined subject, objectified

and regulated (Foucault 203). Twain uses his own character to chastise the human race. He treats his life as a text to be picked apart and plagiarized. He is a character in his own comedy. A comedic character, explains Henri Bergson, is set in his vice—a robot programmed to sin (8). “At the root of the comic there is a sort of rigidity which compels its victims to keep strictly to one path,” writes Bergson, “to follow it straight along, to shut their ears and refuse to listen” (90-91). It is a delusion of Twain’s own choosing, but once chosen, the course is set. Paradoxically, when he is writing about himself, Twain is both the creator and victim of controlling external forces. He can introduce whatever challenge he wants, and watch his own character react. Twain sees himself as the quintessential human being, full of greed and selfish drives, vulnerable to his own training and inborn nature, both sympathetic and damnable.

Unlike the villains, however, Twain is eager for the punishment part of the program. Twain, it seems, gets a bit of a rush out of the shame of humanity; he giddily anticipates the impending payback for expressing selfish desires for fame and fortune—it will give him material. For Twain and other masochists, guilt has the quality of a joke. Their “punishment” is actually a forbidden pleasure (Deleuze). Writing is Twain’s lash to beat himself with. But it is also the lash he will apply to the villains who, willing or not, have earned their punishment. The pain imbalance caused by Twain’s villains promises action; it is a wheel poised at the top of a hill, and the anticipation of when it will begin to roll (and in which direction) is riveting. Will it punish undeserved pleasure or transform undeserved pain? Whether he

chooses to correct the imbalance or excite indignation in his readers at a persistent injustice, Twain enters the pain economy at its most dynamic point, and there he romps.

Laughing at villainy

The pain economy may seek a balance, but Twain's writing does not always depict a pain-neutral world. He gives us "life as I find it" ("Poor Little Stephen" 548). Real life—under the control of God, rich men, or fate—doesn't play fair. If Twain is to critique the injustice, he must draw our attention to it, exaggerate it, dwell in it. Playing sadist for the moment, the author inflicts suffering on his characters in imitations of the pain imbalance of real life. In "About Magnanimous-Incident Literature" (1878), for example, a pious doctor who once helps a poodle with a broken leg is now overrun by an army of broken-legged dogs, seeking and expecting healing. Finally, the doctor sighs, "I might as well acknowledge it, I have been fooled by the books; they only tell the pretty part of the story, and then stop. Fetch me the shot-gun; this thing has gone far enough" (704). But before he can kill the mob of needy canines, the original poodle bites the doctor and gives him rabies. There are no heroes in this story. Twain insists on presenting reality, in all its unbalanced ugliness, as the object of our laughter.

It is in these kinds of stories, rather than the heroic tales, that Twain's literary character is established in depth. In the second "Magnanimous-Incident" tale, an established author makes the grave error of reading the manuscript of a

struggling young author and helping him to publish it.³² Like the wounded poodle, the young author returns with a host of struggling authors in tow, and the established author is fully exploited by the upstarts. He concludes bitterly, “Whom God sees fit to starve, let not man presumptuously rescue to his own undoing” (706). Twain does not set himself up as a moral hero—Livy, for instance, would never begrudge the inconvenience required to keep a person from starving. If anything, Twain paints himself as callous to the pain of others the moment it begins to require anything of him.

And so, himself a flawed and wholly un-heroic human, he stands in the perfect position to attack those who, like him, have the urge to help themselves above all others, but, unlike him, manage to do so without accruing any suffering at all. Here, his humor takes on its most “serious” goal. “To excite the laughter of God’s creatures!” cries James Cox. “That is the unmistakable intention shining through the assumed stateliness, the ponderous gravity, the elaborate mechanical analogy, and the pervasive self-deprecation. It does not merely shine through but assimilates these solemnities in such a way that they become part of the intention itself” (33). In the face of villainy, we are tempted to believe, laughter becomes a tool of justice. Freud suggests that humor’s subtle attack on authority is intrinsically attractive to us, because it permits no recourse for the powerful (100). This, however, is not always the case. Although some jokes work to undercut the unquestioned practices of daily life and social mores, says Simon Critchley, “most of the best jokes are fairly

³² Twain complains of this problem as early as 1870 in his *Galaxy* piece, “A General Reply.”

reactionary or, at best, simply serve to reinforce social consensus" (*On Humour* 11). As I have said before, Twain's moral law—the pain economy—is descriptive rather than prescriptive. Twain is no reformer. He doesn't necessarily want the villains to change their ways; he merely wants permission to expose and manipulate the pain imbalance they have created. In doing so, Twain will almost certainly make us laugh.

What our laughter means—whether it is punishment, sheer pleasure, or an excuse of the bad behavior of the villains—is largely up to us. Twain's humor is malleable, transferable between guilty parties. So often, as we laugh, we realize that we are not only laughing at Twain, not really ridiculing the villains he targets, but we are laughing at ourselves. Critchley describes a kind of humor that, having weakened our defenses,

rebounds upon the subject. We realize in an instant that the object of laughter is the subject who laughs. After the wave of laughter has hit us with its saline spray, an undertow of doubt threatens to drag us under the water's surface. And there is no wave without the undertow. (*On Humour* 49-50)

Twain invites us to own our responsibility for the world's pain, to assume the shame of humanity along with the pleasure of amusement. If we, like Twain, are willing to accept our villainy, our punishment, and our debt, then humor can be our reward as well. To do so, we must recognize humor as bound to pain. "Humor," writes Gregg Camfield, quoting Kierkegaard, "has its justification precisely in its tragic side, in the fact that it reconciles itself to . . . pain" (510). For Twain, Camfield goes on, "humor itself *was* the consolation" (510). If a person chooses to resist this exchange, however, humor can become a whip. It is wise to laugh along.

Al Capp, the creator of *L'il Abner*, once said, "All comedy is based on man's delight in man's inhumanity to man" (qtd. in Morreall, "Rejection" 245). Capp may be stretching to insist that this is true of "all comedy," but there *is* intense comedic energy around suffering, embarrassment, and loss, and Twain was keen to capitalize on it. "It is an index of Mark Twain's urbanity . . . that he can make the damned human race seem at times amusing, at times depraved, at times both," writes W. R. Irwin (46). We are forced to ask whether Twain's humorous observations of human depravity excuses or punishes the crime. Are we laughing at or laughing with the villains? Bergson suggests that humor is, through the shame of being the butt of a joke, a corrective force. But Twain did not always seem interested in changing his villains. He merely wanted to reveal them, flog them, laugh at them. Whether they enjoyed the ridicule or not was up to them. The potential is for laughter to set the pain balance back to zero, delivering pleasure to the sufferer and payback to the comfortable. But it is in Twain's best interest to cover his tracks. George Bernard Shaw once said of Twain: "He is in very much the same position as myself. He has to put things in such a way as to make people who would otherwise hang him believe he is joking" (qtd. in Kaplan 382). Humor is a place of transformation and of rebalance, where the forces of human depravity and morality can coexist and tangle with each other in a fruitful chaos.

Twain's humor in the face of villainy is a complicated dance of guilt, amusement, and punishment. When he attacks moral miscreants, Twain is capitalizing on our desire to judge each other, to feel righteous in the face of

another's sins. "[H]uman nature is not just intrinsically moral," writes Jonathan Haidt, "It's also intrinsically moralistic, critical, and judgmental . . . an obsession with righteousness (leading inevitably to self-righteousness) is the normal human condition" (xiii). As Twain puts it: "If a man doesn't believe as we do, we say he is a crank, and that settles it. I mean it does nowadays, because now we can't burn him" (*FE* 756). Twain will by no means let us off the hook for our self-righteousness, even as he asks us to judge the villains with him. Twain entices us to empathize with his judgments—Freud argues that joking creates an alliance between joker and audience despite inhibitions, decency, and other social constructs (128)—and so maneuvers us into a position of moral equality with him. If we are willing to share in his moral self-righteousness, we must share in his iniquity as well (and Twain regarded his sins as immense). We fall into our moral stance by feeling, not by choice, and Twain is very skilled at making an easy path for his readers to feel their way along to their deserved lot.

How to recognize a villain

Mark Twain's villains commit the cardinal sin—they benefit willingly from the pain of others. For many of Twain's villains, the allure of social pleasure—flattery and external approval, for instance—proves the primary end of all other gains, financial or otherwise. "[P]ublic opinion can force some men to do *anything*," he wrote (*WM* 742). No one is immune. Twain's confidence in the power of social pleasure is evidenced in the way he writes even his protagonists. Tom Sawyer acts

under the “common, and rather adult, desire to be thought well of,” writes Tom Quirk (HNB 30). Twain’s jaunty travel narrators, Tom Canty in *The Prince and the Pauper*, the Edwardses in “The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg,” and many more share this all-too-human desire to be popular—often resulting in disgrace.

Bergson—following in a long tradition of philosophers who espouse what John Morreall calls the Superiority Theory of humor—declares vanity to be the essential comic trait, perhaps even an essentially human trait. In fact, Bergson goes so far as to define modesty as nothing more than a “meditation on vanity. It springs from the sight of others’ mistakes and the dread of being similarly deceived” (85). Because the audience fears becoming like the target of the laughter, says Bergson, humor becomes a force for moral correction. Twain does not blame humans simply for being vulnerable to an appeal to the ego; in fact, he depends upon this feature to make his humor work. It is when they work to satisfy their egos at the expense of another that Twain judges them. One of the earliest sketches from Mark Twain’s body of work—written long before he was known as “Mark Twain”—demonstrates how feeding the ego with self-glorification crosses from sympathetic to objectionable. In the story, Twain engages the desire for outside approval through a technique that Freud describes as the “going-one-better joke,” in which a character attempts to demonstrate his superiority but ultimately proves the opposite (60).

“The Dandy Frightening the Squatter” (1852) is a simple tale: a mustachioed young dandy appears in Hannibal, “bent on making an impression upon the hearts of the young ladies on board” his steamboat (1). With self-promotion as his stated

goal, the dandy approaches a loafing squatter and declares, "Ladies, if you wish to enjoy a good laugh, step out on the guards. I intend to frighten that gentleman into fits who stands on the bank" (1). It is the most obvious and rudimentary of exchanges—the dandy will glean amusement and social status by terrifying the unoffending stranger with his knife and his two guns. His plan backfires, however, when the squatter, after giving him the once over, punches the dandy straight into the Mississippi. Young Samuel Clemens, then sixteen or seventeen years old, makes sure the villain is properly punished and the victim rewarded for his pains. As the dandy is fished from the river, the female spectators "unanimously voted the knife and pistols to the victor" (2). It is the pain economy in its most basic state.

In Twain's evolving perception of the human-divine pain exchange, vanity proves a common weakness. The fact that "the world calls [God] the All-Just, the All-Righteous, the All-Good, the All-Merciful, the All-Forgiving, the All-Truthful, the All-Loving, the Source of All Morality" (*BA* 231-32) points to a puzzling delusion on the part of humanity. There can only be one of two explanations, says Joe Fulton. "If Twain saw human stupidity as one motive for appealing to Providence, an inflated sense of human worth is another" (55). We either flatter ourselves by believing we have the attention of this great being, or we absolve God by ignoring the fact that he permits needless suffering. Twain sometimes accepts the fault as human and allows God to reign as a gigantic and blithely ignorant deity, but the closer Twain can bring God to humanity, the easier he is to handle on the page. Thus, Twain's most interesting writings about God's character show him with that very human desire

for ego-inflation. This God listens to his long string of unearned compliments, enjoys them, and hungers for more. When both God and his followers are scrambling for the social pleasure of self-importance, Twain can hit all his birds with one stone.

The villainous church

It was evident to Twain that the principles of right and wrong preached on Sunday largely guided the public dialogue on morality, and he often spoke in religious terms when discussing human behavior. Twain called himself a Presbyterian, but he bristled at Christian doctrine. Twain sometimes distinguishes between “Christian” behavior—meaning upright and moral—and the flawed teachings and institutions of Christianity. “The failings of Christianity always made his blood boil,” writes Michael Shelden, “but he still felt a sentimental attachment to the church of his youth and was inclined to help it. He could view such generosity as a public duty, whereas his feud with God was mostly a private affair” (77). Shelden may overestimate the privacy of Twain’s quarrel with God as well as his dedication to the well-being of the larger church, but he nevertheless reminds us that there is a distinction between the church for which Twain harbored a sentimental respect and the church for which he developed a virulent animosity. Twain knew that a person’s religious identity had almost nothing to do with rational thought. He writes, “If religions were got by reasoning, we should have the extraordinary spectacle of an American family with a Presbyterian in it, and a Baptist, a Methodist, a Catholic, a Mohammedan, a Buddhist, and a Mormon” (*Christian Science* 66-67). Religion is a

matter of “environment,” says Twain. Acknowledging his own unasked-for Christian identity, Twain could attack the Christian faith and its institutions with insight of an insider and the indignation of an unwilling victim.

The villainy of the church, in Twain’s eyes, is half-borrowed from its deity, though it is sometimes difficult to decipher whether Twain considers his target the “real” God or one created entirely by human imagination. In his writings, Twain goes back and forth between the two, not always with clear delineation. The doctrine of special Providence—the idea that God ordains all events, pleasant or otherwise—was a particular sticking point for Twain. John Calvin, originator of the Reformed theology taught to Presbyterians like young Samuel Clemens, makes this point explicitly in his writings. In a section of *Institutions of the Christian Religion* titled “The nature of providence,” Calvin writes, “First, then, let the reader remember that the providence we mean is not one by which the Deity, sitting idly in heaven, looks on at what is taking place in the world, but one by which he, as it were, holds the helms and overrules all events” (I.16.4). Calvin’s Divine Providence is active, knowing, conscious of every moment. Twain takes Calvin’s providence and runs it through the pain economy. If God is in charge of all events, then he is to be blamed for undeserved suffering as much as he is to be praised for unexpected blessings. In Twain’s experience, the former was the more frequent occurrence.

Twain works out the calculations, as usual, through his writing. The young protagonist of Twain’s sketch, “Colloquy Between a Slum Child and a Moral

Mentor,"³³ continually confuses God with the Chief of Police. To the child, power is power, and power is inevitably set against the boy, as evidenced by his pain-ridden life. God (or the Chief of Police, perhaps) may be responsible for making the grass grow, but he also causes an iron railing to stand around the yard to keep the boy from enjoying it (253). If God made the world and its rules, then God designed a world to exclude the boy from pleasure. Learning that God made not only the grass and the railing but the boy himself, the child cries out, "Honest injun? That's bully. But I wish he'd fence me in and take care of me, same as he does the grass" (255). The "moral mentor" tries to convince the slum child that he should be thankful for the small comforts God has given him, but the boy finds it difficult to grub up much gratitude for his raggedy clothes or the cellar door that serves as his bed. Warnings about the dangers of hell backfire on the boy. When the mentor threatens him with the fires of perdition if he does not stop using slang, the boy responds, "Suits Crooks! *I never been warm enough yet, ony summer time. Wisht I'd a been there in the winter when I hadn't any bed kiver but a shutter*" (253). His earthly life is so hard that hell would be a mercy to him. The rules of God's morality—thank God for your blessings, fear God's punishments for your sins—break down when applied to the slum child.

When evaluated through the pain economy, God comes out the clear villain. In his "Reflections on Religion" dictations, Twain measures God's morality by the numbers:

³³ Unpublished by Twain.

He is always punishing—punishing trifling misdeeds with thousandfold severity; punishing innocent children for the misdeeds of their parents; punishing unoffending populations for the misdeeds of their rulers; even descending to wreak bloody vengeance upon harmless calves and lambs and sheep and bullocks as punishment for inconsequential trespasses committed by their proprietors. (332)

Note that Twain attempts to put the imbalance into mathematical terms with “thousandfold”; he soon revises the number to “ten-thousand fold” and “ten-billionfold.” Although these are blatant exaggerations, they point to the fact that Twain was making his calculations of pain and suffering even on God’s account. The problem is not merely that God commits these evil acts but that he pretends his actions are moral while damning emulation by people. And he has an entire religion on deck to back up his deranged morality. “He has one code of morals for himself, and quite another for his children,” complains Satan in “Letters from the Earth,” observing the patterns of human-divine interaction:

He requires his children to deal justly—and gently—with offenders, and forgive them seventy-and-seven times; whereas he deals neither justly nor gently with any one, and he did not forgive the ignorant and thoughtless first pair of juveniles even their first small offence and say “You may go free this time, I will give you another chance.” (BA 231)

From the very beginning, God reveals his character to be unjust and vindictive. And yet, for some reason, people still seem to believe in the possibility that God will deal fairly with them, providing pleasure in proportion to suffering. But the gods we worship disappoint us, Twain promises:

It is to these celestial bandits that the naïve and confiding and illogical human rabbit looks for a Heaven of eternal bliss, which is to be his reward for patiently enduring the want and sufferings inflicted upon

him here below—unearned sufferings covering terms of two or three years in some cases; five or ten years in others; thirty, forty or fifty in others; sixty, seventy, eighty in others. As usual, where the Deity is Judge the rewards are vastly out of proportion to the sufferings—and there is no system about the matter anyhow. You do not get any more Heaven for suffering eighty years than you get if you die of the measles at three. (RR 349)

It is this disproportion that so bothers Twain. It violates the most basic laws of pain exchange. It is the very definition of immorality.

But is this a God that created a religion based on injustice or is this a God created *by* such a religion? Twain turns to the so-called Word of God for answers. “[The Bible] is perhaps the most damnatory biography that exists in print anywhere,” declares Twain. “Our Bible reveals to us the character of God with minute and remorseless exactness. The portrait is substantially that of a man—if one can imagine a man charged and overcharged with evil impulses far beyond the human limit” (RR 332). It is as if we created our deity with our own faults for the sake of convenience alone.

Regardless of who or what created whom, Twain saw the Christian scripture as a flawed text. He accuses the Bible (and all holy scriptures of all people) of plagiarism, “which is a distinctly immoral act” (RR 335). As Allison Ensor has shown, Twain found the Bible surpassingly faulty. Ensor and Fulton both stress that Twain’s frustrations with the Bible cannot ever be mistaken for disinterest, however. “Twain raged against it as wicked, obscene, and damnatory; but he could never ignore it” (Ensor 1). Whether because of its social or its personal importance, the Bible provided Twain with a great deal of material for parody, reference, imitation, and

moral scrutiny. Ensor documents the ever-present influence of scripture in Twain's writings—casual references to specific verses, imitative language, borrowed imagery, etc. As Ensor points out, half-quoting Bible verses and joking around with well-known characters from the Bible was common practice in humor writing of the time. Nineteenth-century readers were assumed to have at least a cursory familiarity with the language, images, and characters of the Bible.

One of the greatest stretchers told by the Bible, Twain thought, were the miracles. Because they violated both natural law (supposedly God's law) and personal experience (which was notably lacking in miracles) the biblical miracle stories proved one too many for Twain (Ensor 80-81). Like Huck, Twain looks askance at anything—and specifically the Bible—that he can't experience at first hand (Kazin 185). If the miracles *are* real and possible, Twain demands to know why there are so few of them. He scoffs at a God

who mourns over the sufferings of mankind and would like to remove them, and is quite competent to remove them at any moment He may choose—satisfies Himself with restoring sight to a blind person here and there instead of restoring it to all the blind; cures a cripple here and there instead of curing all the cripples; furnishes to five thousand famishing persons a meal and lets the rest of the millions that are hungry remain hungry—and all the time He admonishes inefficient man to cure these ills which God Himself inflicted upon him, and which He could extinguish with a word if He chose to do it, and thus do a plain duty which He had neglected from the beginning and always will neglect while time shall last. (RR 334)

The refusal to employ power on behalf of the suffering is just as damnable as the conscious infliction of pain. To allow this, God “must either be stupid or malevolent—or else the Bible is wrong” (Ensor 67).

Twain toyed with the idea that there might be some kind of non-Biblical deity: “the real God, the genuine God, the great God, the sublime and supreme God, the authentic Creator of the *real* universe, whose remotenesses are visited by comets only” (RR 343). “When we think of such a God,” Twain muses, “we cannot associate with Him anything trivial, anything lacking dignity, anything lacking grandeur” (343). This great and supreme God interacts only through the laws of nature. He is not distracted by the trivialities of human life. But this God fares no better than the biblical one. “Do we also know that He is a moral being, according to our standard of morals? No. If we know anything at all about it we know that He is destitute of morals—at least of the human pattern” (344). The proof is in the daily experience of earthly life; under the watch of God’s natural law, pain and suffering spring eternal. Even non-human life shows God as disinterested and cruel, absent of any moral integrity:

In flying into the web the fly is merely guilty of an indiscretion—not a breach of any law—yet the fly’s punishment is ten-thousandfold out of proportion to that little indiscretion. . . . The ten-thousandfold law of punishment is rigorously enforced against every creature, man included. The debt, whether made innocently or guiltily, is promptly collected by Nature—and in this world, without waiting for the ten-billionfold additional penalty appointed—in the case of man—for collection in the next. (RR 347)

As always, Twain is working the calculations on his villains with relentless devotion.

The human race fared better than at any other time in Twain's writings when compared to God (either that of the Bible or natural law). In "Letters from the Earth," Satan declares of humanity, "They are better than their Bible" (BA 252). God's punishment is inordinate and misplaced, but people only rarely follow his example and can never execute violence on the grand scale that he does. Twain sees hope in the fact that God's "moral" acts are the exception. The practice of Christianity, he finds, is superior to its statutes—if only very slightly.

There is one notable thing about our Christianity: bad, bloody, merciless, money-grabbing and predatory as it is—in our country particularly, and in all other Christian countries in a somewhat modified degree—it is still a hundred times better than the Christianity of the Bible, with its prodigious crime—the invention of Hell. Measured by our Christianity of to-day, bad as it is, hypocritical as it is, empty and hollow as it is, neither the Deity nor His Son is a Christian, nor qualified for that moderately high place. Ours is a terrible religion. The fleets of the world could swim in spacious comfort in the innocent blood it has spilt. (RR 338)

This "exoneration" of Christians speaks volumes to Twain's opinions of the religion proper.

"A hundred times better" than the Biblical Christianity or not, Christians nevertheless earn Twain's contempt. As Twain understood it, the impulse towards religion evidenced a selfish, weak-minded neediness. Rather than improve morality, religion corrupts its believers. Twain argues that "[man] is the only animal that has a True Religion—several of them. He is the only animal that loves his neighbor as himself, and cuts his throat if his theology isn't straight" ("Man's Place" 211). If I am righteous and my neighbor iniquitous, the argument goes, then my hatred of him is

holy. But doctrine has no currency in the pain economy, so religious-based violence is as brutal as any other kind.

The principle applies to a nation as readily as to an individual. Religion tacitly approves war, if it is waged to convert or conquer heathens or to defend God's chosen country. Using the religious leadership of Czar Nicholas II, Queen Victoria, and King Leopold II as examples, Twain argued that as a nation became more pious it also became more violent (RR 339-41). Twain, however, thought it absurd that any nation could be thought more righteous than another, made up as they were of human beings. What right had any nation to claim moral authority over another, to lecture, to send missionaries? Responding to the story of a girl in New York who, suspected of adultery, was stripped and beaten publicly by the men in her town, Twain beckons the missionaries home from their "good work" abroad. "God knows they are needed at home. There are no meaner, mangier, filthier savages in all the wide domain of barbarism than the Christian town of Cohocton, right here at our elbow, can produce" ("Domestic Missionaries" 432). Twain repeated the cry, though he did not publish it this time, in "The United States of Lyncherdom": "O kind missionary, O compassionate missionary, leave China! Come home and correct these Christians" (486). He summons them with the graphic image of hundreds of lynched bodies lined up across the country, blazing in the night. Around them are the mobs of Americans, assumed to be Christians and behaving, as Twain saw it, according to their creed.

Mark Twain's attitude towards missionaries—the most active proponents of Christianity—was ambivalent. On the one hand, he saw them as carriers of a virulent message. On the other hand, he respected their self-sacrifice for the sake of, as they saw it, helping others. And he, like so many of his time, approved of the “civilizing” influence the missionaries had in “savage” lands.³⁴ Too often, however, the missionaries' sacrifice was balanced out by the suffering of their intended converts. In “The Story of Mamie Grant, the Child-Missionary,” Twain dramatizes the failure of the good intentions of missionaries. Like “The Story of the Good Little Boy Who Did Not Prosper,” the main character of the tale is young child who aspires to live out the Sunday-school model of religion. Mamie expects that, as in the books, her proselytizing to those around her will pay off richly for herself and her converts. Twain's child missionary is naïve, sold on the missionary line. She doesn't see that the writers of the tracts she pushes on her aunt, the census-taker, or anyone else who shows up at the door, are fools who fantasize about a gritty life of sin. She thrusts her tracts at strangers, thinking her little pamphlets are a path to salvation, unaware of the gruesome and terrifying threats of punishment contained therein. They seem more likely to drive a person insane than drive them to religion.

The missionary's sin exchange reveals itself to stand in direct opposition to the pain economy. When repentance and redemption (rather than restitution) are the primary goals, a sinner may continue his offense unchecked, so long as he goes

³⁴ This particular outlook changed significantly during Twain's lifetime. The change from his matter-of-fact praise of the missionary mission in *Roughing It* and his Sandwich Islands correspondence to his fiery takedown of the “Blessings-of-Civilization Trust” in his essay “To the Person Sitting in Darkness” is stark.

through periodic reforms. One of Mamie's tracts tells of a man who constantly reiterates patterns of drunken, murderous rage and pious reform. Under the influence of "the tempter," he repeatedly murders his family (he gets a new one after each rampage). But he need never pay back those he has harmed, as long as he pays God with his worship and testimony. "Thoroughly reformed at last, he now traverses the land a brand plucked from the burning, and delivers temperance lectures and organizes Sunday Schools," glows Mamie. "Go thou and do likewise" (267). Emulation hardly seems good advice!

For the most part, Mamie is as much a dupe of the religious sin exchange as anyone, but Twain will nevertheless hold her accountable for the pain she causes. Seeking her own righteous reward, Mamie causes great harm to her "unregenerated" uncle through her missionary work. He loses his house, his standing in the community, and even his legal identity because of the girl—all for the "benefit" of Mamie's imagined moral victory to be recorded in the Sunday-school books (268). His loss and pain are not lessened simply because the girl believed she was doing right. The story of the Infidel in "What is Man?" addresses this same missionary dilemma. Believing his religion to be the only path to salvation, the Infidel converts the child of his host shortly before the boy dies. On his deathbed, the boy reprimands the Infidel for removing from him his only source of real comfort. Racked with guilt, the Infidel then *himself* converts to Christianity and, when taken in by a heathen family some time later, repeats the offense in reverse with the same result—the child is heartbroken at losing his religion in the time of his need. Twain's

missionaries are always in this difficult position—offering something unwanted and unneeded to people who would be better left alone. The propagation of pain is implicit in the missionary's role, regardless of whether he or she intends it.

In the case of Rev. T. DeWitt Talmage, Twain found the “intent” clear enough. When Talmage published an article complaining about the body odor of working men in church, Twain was incensed. He published his response, “About Smells,” in the *Galaxy* in 1870. Twain instantly takes up the side of the persecuted, mocking the idea of Talmage in heaven wearing coattails and kid gloves while standing next to humble, tattered saints (365). Twain invites into heaven the people he imagines to be the most odorous:

a number of negroes, and Esquimaux, and Terra del Fuegians, and Arabs, and a few Indians, and possibly even some Spaniards and Portuguese. All things are possible with God. We shall have all these sorts of people in heaven; but, alas! In getting them we shall lose the society of Dr. Talmage (“About Smells” 365).

It is obvious that Twain is more interested in punishing the pastor than in offering dignity or religious equality to those Talmage disdains. Twain carries Talmage's snobbery to its logical end, arguing that his attitude is essentially unchristian. (Again, Twain suppresses his opinions about the real value of “Christian” behavior as the moment requires.) Had Talmage been chosen to be one of Jesus' first disciples, he would have certainly deserted “because he could not have stood the fishy smell of some of his comrades who came from around the Sea of Galilee” (366). Twain concludes by comparing “the imposing heroism” of the martyrs with “a poor little effeminacy that withers and wilts under an unsavory smell” (366). Twain wouldn't

have counted it a great trial to be banned from church, but the intentional exclusion and humiliation of poor men and women in the church was enough of a sin to move him to defend their right to be there.

A year later, Twain was taking on another church leader for a similar sin. This time, the offender was the Rev. Mr. Sabine. Sabine's offense was a refusal to bury a comic stage actor, George Holland, citing his church's belief that acting was an "immoral" profession. In his defense of the actor, Twain expands the definition of "God's work," claiming that Holland is *more* Christian than Rev. Sabine. Sabine, warns Twain, works under a false assumption of moral superiority.

If we probe, and dissect, and lay open this diseased, this cancerous piety of his, we are forced to the conviction that it is a production of an impression on his part that his guild do about all the good that is done in the earth, and hence are better than common clay. ("Indignity" 517)

The claim to holiness is a claim to power, and Twain was not willing that only a few should hold such power. Twain defends written and dramatic fictional narratives and newspapers as the primary source of "kindness and forbearance and Christian charity and generosity in the hearts of the American people to-day" (518). These values originate in the Bible, Twain concedes, but they are best taught through empathy with stories presented on the stage and the page "and NOT from the drowsy pulpit" (519). The church fails the test of the pain economy. It demands self-sacrifice and loyalty but denies its constituents any observable benefit, not even amusement. Whatever good it might teach is mitigated by poor entertainment values:

I am aware that in its honest and well-meaning way it bores the people with unflammable truisms about doing good; bores them with correct compositions on charity; bores them, chloroforms them, stupefies them with argumentative mercy without a flaw in the grammar, or an emotion which the minister could put in in the right place if he turned his back and took his finger off the manuscript. (520)

To Twain, most church leaders appeared, at best, wolves in sheep's clothing. With a few exceptions, Twain saw in the clergy a dangerous combination of inflexible and uninteresting church doctrine and unmitigated power over their parishioners.

Power within the church is bad enough, but Twain found that it became alarmingly easy to rig the pain exchange when religious and political powers were united. Until American imperialism began in earnest at the turn of the century, Twain saw the Catholic Church as the primary offender on this front. Catholicism, Twain believed, catered to the lust for power in priests and leaders alike. In his eyes, the church was primitive, premodern, and tyrannous—a far sight too close to monarchy for his comfort (Fulton 23). In *Connecticut Yankee*, Hank Morgan makes it his personal mission to undermine both of the controlling hierarchies in Camelot—the church and the nobility—and replace them with democracy and Protestantism. Hank sees power as the root of the problem:

Concentration of power in a political machine is bad; and an Established Church is only a political machine; it was invented for that, it is nursed, coddled, preserved for that; it is an enemy to human liberty, and does no good which it could not better do in a split-up and scattered condition. (*Connecticut Yankee* 161)

Though Hank acknowledges that some priests are sincerely interested in the welfare of the people, a church state is inherently corrupt. “Hank valorizes

Protestantism not for its theology but because it is decentralized,” Susan K. Harris writes; it is the free market of religion (*God’s Arbiters* 87). Twain made no bones about his prejudice towards the Catholic faith, and he railed against the “concentration of power” the church represented openly.

But the rise of American imperialism, especially as it intersected with the work of missionaries, proved that the church—any church—could be irresistibly drawn to power. What Twain had always believed of the Catholics now appeared true of all creeds. Eventually, Harris writes, Twain more or less equated “Christian” and “imperialist”—especially in the case of missionaries (“Christian Mission” 38). It was difficult to see the missionaries as anything but an extension of the imperialist effort. Harris points out that when the missionaries relied on military protection, they invited a moral association with the actions of the government: “[T]he American Missionary Board’s collaboration with military and commercial interests in China and the Philippines highlighted the inherent contradictions of proselytizing the Gospel in a world where ‘foreign fields’ increasingly referred to market factors and a capitalist determination to use any means, religious or military, to secure them” (“Christian Mission” 50). The nominal effort to bring democracy, liberty, and salvation to the people of the world was watered down by the desire for self-benefit. Worst of all, their work was funded by other villains. In the 1905 sketch, “A Humane Word from Satan,” Twain, once again using Satan as his narrator, suggests that the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (often referred to simply as the American Board) is largely supported by “conscience money” from dead

people's wills (656). These dead scoundrels, instead of leaving their money to their rightful heirs who may do some good with it, try to pay off their debt by giving it to a "good cause"—but as Twain well knows, the Christian mission is a benefit to no one. The growing debt in the pain economy was the nail in the coffin of Twain's already pallid faith in the evangelical (apparently imperialist) cause. And the body he chose to bury in that coffin was one William Scott Ament.

"To the Person Sitting in Darkness," published in the *North American Review* in 1901, and the follow-up piece, "To My Missionary Critics," address the "civilizing" work of American missionaries, specifically Rev. William Scott Ament, a missionary sponsored by the American Board. Ament had recently collected what Twain decried as exorbitant "indemnities" from Chinese villagers following the Boxer Rebellion. But even when Ament's reported thirteen times overcharge for Christian losses was revised down (by dint of a telegraph error) to an excess of one-third, Twain was not mollified. The violation stands; the degree of theft does not change the name of the crime. As evidenced by the math, Ament was a villain, and Twain felt no compunctions about taking him to task for his sins.

Looting Chinese villages was not Ament's only offense, however. "To the Person Sitting in Darkness" opens with three excerpts (two quite lengthy) from New York newspapers. The first is a brief message of Christmas cheer, extoling the reader to surrender to the spirit of the season and dismiss any who maintain their sour mood on this day. The second is a somewhat breathless recitation of the hidden vices and abuses of the slums of New York—prostitution, corruption, destitution, etc.

The third excerpt is the original newspaper account of Ament's behavior in China following the rebellion. Although Twain launches straight into the material economics of Ament's conduct, the juxtaposition of the newspaper clippings is important. By showing the moral state of things at home, Twain erodes the claim of the missionaries to be bringing a better kind of civilization, a more sound ethical system, to the people they minister to. The missionaries have no morals to teach. They must be there for some other purpose. Twain argues that the missionary is part of the "Blessings-of-Civilization Trust," offering "Glass Beads and Theology, and Maxim Guns and Hymn Books, and Trade-Gin and Torches of Progress and Enlightenment (patent adjustable ones, good to fire villages with, upon occasion)" to "the peoples that sit in darkness" in an effort to get something out of them ("To the Person" 461). Twain lays out his full calculations of the evangelist-imperialist's mission:

Extending the Blessings of Civilization to our Brother who Sits in Darkness has been a good trade and has paid well, on the whole; and there is money in it yet, if carefully worked—but not enough, in my judgment, to make any considerable risk advisable. The People that Sit in Darkness are getting to be too scarce—too scarce and too shy. And such darkness as is now left is really of but an indifferent quality, and not dark enough for the game. The most of those People that Sit in Darkness have been furnished with more light than was good for them or profitable for us. We have been injudicious. (461)

Twain could see that this was a game played for the benefit of the invader, and so he plays along, advising them on how best to capitalize. And the imperialists seem to need advice. Too greedy and too confident, the Trust had played its hand; the abused heathens of the earth were rightly suspicious of the offerings of the West.

Twain names McKinley, Chamberlain, the Kaiser, and the Czar—among others—as bad players in the game. Their self-interest is too obvious. A more skilled offender would hide his tracks. The Boer Wars, with their concentration camps and scorched earth tactics; the mishandling of justice in China leading up to the Boxer Rebellion; the Russo-Japanese conflict over Port Arthur; the reverse course of the United States on promoting real independence in Cuba and the Philippines—these seemed to Twain to be betrayals of the ideals of these “Christian” countries. Of course, the sins of the United States hung heaviest of all on Twain.

Even Twain, though he found Christianity generally repellent, had something to lose in this new picture of the “American Christian.” Unlike the mostly harmless—if contemptible—pilgrims of *Innocents Abroad*, these missionaries of Christ and democracy were doing real and lasting injury to the people they encountered. Twain was part of a general disillusionment, says Harris. “As they absorbed the information that their military practiced torture and that their elected representatives approved it, Americans were forced to confront the possibility that the American Christian might be a force for evil rather than for good” (“Christian Mission” 40). Two American ideals—the furtherance of capitalism and of democracy—were coming into conflict, and many were disturbed with the results. Twain’s anti-imperialist and anti-missionary writings brought letters from far and wide, largely in support of his criticisms (Willis 260). The close alliance of religious and political bodies was distasteful to many Americans. Regardless of whether he believed in the theology of Christianity, Twain felt implicated in the actions of the

“American Christian.” The pain inflicted by American Christianity was not only on the people of the countries “ministered to”; it also fell on Americans at home who, necessarily, felt shame for the actions done in the name of the American Christian.

Dispensation

Prone to sweeping judgments about the value of church, God, and faith, Twain was forced by circumstance and experience to acknowledge exceptions to the rule. Over and again, Twain encountered sincere Christians who were *not* dupes of corrupt leadership. In the years spent at Nook Farm, Twain found a community that was sympathetic to his mixed feelings about religion. Although most of his neighbors were brought up in the Calvinist tradition, almost all had “rejected the faith of his [or her] youth” (Andrews 67). This is not to say that religion was not a part of the Nook Farm community or Twain’s life. To the contrary, Twain found clergymen among his neighbors—most notably Joseph Twichell—and enjoyed hashing out theology with them. Kenneth Andrews suggests that Twain’s friendship with pastors was more a matter of sincere attraction than some kind of guilt-ridden effort to find his way back into the good graces of God (71). Twain’s interest in the divine did not hinge on God’s approval of him.

Joseph Twichell and Mark Twain were kindred spirits. A chaplain in the Civil War, Twichell gravitated towards a down-and-dirty application of his faith. As a pastor in Hartford, Twichell stayed faithful to his wartime philosophy. “He spoke always of what interested him most—of brotherliness, of the Christian ethic as the

assurance and foundation of a good life, of the emotional, uncoded relation of man to a God of love, and of his optimistic perception of a growing kindness among humanity" (Andrews 15). Twichell's faith demonstrated in the kind of virtue that Twain deeply believed in, though expressed in different terms. Just as importantly, perhaps, Twichell could appreciate Twain's sense of humor, even when it dipped into suffering and ugliness for its material. "His sense of humor was not bounded by a horror of the vulgar," writes Andrews (49). As he was wont to do, Twain granted a dispensation for those he loved and admired. Twain overlooked Twichell's association with organized religion. If it was a moral failing, Twain charged him for his faults only in playful provocations, usually offering a laugh in tandem with the jibe.

Even Twain's mistrust of Catholicism was surprisingly fluid when he considered the personal benefit it might provide to one whom he loved. Reflecting on his daughter Jean's study at a convent, Twain wrote approvingly,

And away deep down in my heart I feel that if they make a good strong unshakable Catholic of her I shan't be the least little bit sorry. It is doubtless the most peace-giving and restful of all religions. If I had it I would not trade it for anything in the earth. If I ever change my religion I shall change to that. (Clemens 100)

Jean was beginning to manifest signs of epilepsy, and her parents were agonized at the thought of what the future might bring for her. Here was the hope of peace. Of course, Twain was not about to change his religion (or lack thereof), but his wistful fantasy of becoming a Catholic makes one thing clear: the only absolute for Twain is

suffering, and the moral value of a person or a religion lies in his or her ability to selflessly lessen suffering for those around them.

The Villainess: Mary Baker Eddy

“[I]n all matters of opinion,” Twain declares, “our adversaries are insane” (*Christian Science* 31). Twain concedes that “we are all partially insane,” but recognizing one’s own irrationality is difficult (30). These reflections on opinion and insanity open Twain’s series of essays on Christian Science published by the *North American Review* in 1902 and 1903, later collected into the volume called *Christian Science*.³⁵ Immediately after admitting his strong bias against his “adversaries,” Twain begins to pick apart Mary Baker Eddy and her faithful Christian Scientists. It will be his last concession to her. Yes, the Christian Scientist is insane, Twain insists, but “I mean him no discourtesy, and I am not charging—nor even imagining—that he is insaner than the rest of the human race. I think he is more picturesquely insane than some of us” (34). Though charged with condescension, these words represent a measured gesture of goodwill on Twain’s part. He wants to make it clear that his quarrel is not with the believer but with the prophet of the religion, Eddy herself.

The unfinished “3,000 Years Among the Microbes,” written in the spring of 1905, plays up this distinction between Eddy and her followers. In the story, the narrator, named Huck, is transformed into a cholera germ through a magician’s

³⁵ For the book, Twain included an earlier essay (first published in *Cosmopolitan* in 1899) as his opening chapter, so the admission that “we are all partially insane” no longer opens the conversation on Christian Science, as it does in the *North American Review* series.

experiment gone wrong. The notes to the text mention that Twain had originally ascribed the transformation to the magical powers of an angry Mary Baker Eddy (434). In the course of this odd little story, Huck's assistant (she has chosen for herself the name Catherine of Aragon), converts to the sect of the "Giddyites" after reading its holy text. Twain not so subtly substitutes the title "Science and Wealth" for Eddy's *Science and Health* (491). Twain is gentle with Catherine but critical of the Founder of her religion. All pain is imaginary and ought to be treated so, the Giddyites preach, except for tooth pain. "This was not immoral, not irreligious," explains Huck, "for it was permitted by the finder of the Giddyite religion, who took her own teeth to the painless-gas establishment, and in that way made the departure from principle holy" (493). As she progresses in the sect, Catherine loses the ability (or permission) to speak on religious matters for her own part. Instead, she must recite from the scripture of her sect, word for word. Catherine is sweet but not intelligent. She is evidently a rube, dominated by a wily Founder who fills her head with nonsense.

Twain's skepticism about Christian Science was shared by a large number of Americans. Unlike spiritualism and mesmerism, a fairly loose set of beliefs often practiced as fashionable parlor entertainment, Christian Science was early codified as a formal religion. In a time when the role of women in society was under fierce debate, Mary Baker Eddy's powerful position as the charismatic center of the religion caused many, including Twain, some consternation. What distinguished Eddy as particularly villainous, in Twain's mind, was the immensity of her profit

from the pain of others. Her profit went beyond financial gain. Any quack might make a buck on fantastic promises of healing, but Mary Baker Eddy had made herself into a goddess. In typical fashion, Twain sets out to measure Eddy's sins by means of the pain economy—who she hurt, what she gained, etc. He was not alone in his effort.

Georgine Milmine's *McClure's* articles³⁶ on Mary Baker Eddy claim to be an impartial report of the history of Christian Science. The articles generally dispute major claims made by Eddy and her followers. For example, Milmine includes the sworn testimony of Eddy's physician, Dr. Cushing, who treated her after her notorious fall on the ice. Eddy often cites her fall as the moment of discovery of the Divine Science, claiming she achieved a miraculous healing after being given only days to live. According to Dr. Cushing's records and his memory of the event, however, he never gave her such a dire prognosis, and she continued to visit him for treatment for some time afterwards—a stark contradiction of Eddy's dramatic story of self-healing (Milmine 28: 512-13). The writer of the articles snidely notes that these "facts" may not be accepted by Eddy, since she claims to shun the "mortal mind"—but the reporter protests that she can use nothing *but* her "mortal mind" to

³⁶ Georgine Milmine was a researcher for *McClure's* and gathered a large amount of information on Mary Baker Eddy, but she did not actually write the articles published by the magazine. Although they bear Milmine's name, it is generally understood that these articles (and the book *The Life of Mary Baker G. Eddy and the History of Christian Science* [Doubleday, 1909], which borrows heavily from the *McClure's* essays) were ghostwritten by *McClure's* editor, Willa Cather. Cather was reluctant to claim credit for the Eddy pieces, perhaps for philosophical reasons, perhaps because she was trying to distance herself from journalism. Whatever the case, I will continue to refer to the articles by Milmine's name, although the words are likely Cather's.

reason out the truth of Eddy's history. There is only the slightest pretext of journalistic impartiality. The bias is clearly against Eddy.

The editors at the magazine wisely judged that the *McClure's* audience was more interested in a personal takedown of Eddy than in a fair defense of her religion. In an editorial introducing the series, an unnamed *McClure's* editor (probably Willa Cather) allows that the general public have had a wide range of reactions to the rise of Christian Science, from the "serious-minded," who are concerned for those dying under Christian Science treatment, to the "frivolous," who make a joke out of the idea of "absent treatment" (28:211). She never considers the possibility that her readers might believe in Eddy's religion.

Widespread skepticism about Christian Science did not come all at once, however. At first, publishers were wary of making enemies with those who might support Eddy and her church. Sheldon writes that Twain could not convince Harper's to accept the book version of his Christian Science articles in 1903. By the time the *McClure's* articles began to appear in 1907, however, Harper's was suddenly ready to publish Twain's anti-Eddy material (68-69). In the intervening years, Mary Baker Eddy had become something of a pariah.

Despite his publisher's reluctance to risk offending readers sympathetic to Christian Science, Twain had no such qualms. The editorial reference above to the "frivolous" jokes about the absent treatment of Christian Science very likely referred to Twain, whose 1899 *Cosmopolitan* article was a satire on that very subject. The

article opens with Twain's first-person narrator falling while on a hike in the Alps.³⁷ Finding himself "an incoherent series of compound fractures," the narrator is puzzled that his Christian Science doctor's first inducement was to "remember that there was nothing the matter with me" (*Christian Science* 4-5). Twain intentionally presents his Christian Science practitioner with a very serious, very physical injury—not one that could logically be explained as psychosomatic, like headaches or fatigue. Twain wants to make the practitioner appear as ridiculous as possible, and so he sorts through the Christian Science canon to find the tidbits that best suit his needs. Trying to convince the narrator that the pain from his broken limbs is imaginary, the Christian Science doctor presents him with four "self-evident propositions." Here, Twain quotes directly from *Science and Health*: "1. God is All in all. 2. God is good. Good is Mind. 3. God, Spirit, being all, nothing is matter. 4. Life, God, omnipotent Good, deny death, evil, sin, disease." "There—now you see," concludes the practitioner. "It seemed nebulous," the narrator confesses; "it did not seem to say anything about the difficulty at hand" (10). To help clear things up, she reverses the entire list: "Disease sin evil death deny Good omnipotent life matter . . ." etc., wrapping up with a pat, "There—do you understand now?" (10). The suggestion to read four propositions backwards was offered by Eddy herself "as conclusive proof of their logical truth" (Milmine 31: 180). Eddy does not recommend, as Twain suggests, that the propositions be read in one long string of nonsensical words. Instead, she argues that each individual proposition contains an equivalency

³⁷ This forms the opening chapter of *Christian Science*.

that, as in a mathematical equation, is true, regardless of which element is presented first. Twain, however, is more interested in the apparent absurdities of her claims, and so he takes the reversal literally for full effect.

In spite of his ridicule, there was a part of Twain that wanted to believe in the principles of healing taught by Eddy. Twain generally believed that mind healing could work—the power of imagination, he called it. In fact, when Susy first expressed interest in the related practice of “mind cure,” Twain encouraged her enthusiastically³⁸—

I am perfectly certain that the exasperating colds and the carbuncles came from a diseased mind, and that your mental science could drive them away. . . . I have no language to say how glad and grateful I am that you are a convert to that rational and noble philosophy. Stick to it; don't let anybody talk you out of it. (*LL* 316)

Twain is willing to admit that the principle of mind healing is actually quite attractive—that is part of what made it so dangerous. Because it targets the suffering—those “ailing in body or mind” or acquainted with someone who is (*Christian Science* 40)—Christian Science appeals to the whole human race. Perhaps that is what initially drew his attention. Christian Science seems to be in the business of pain and pain-relief. Even Twain can't deny that the calculations often come out in Eddy's favor. Measuring persons harmed and helped by Christian

³⁸ By the time Jean's epilepsy took its place as the primary health concern for the Clemens family, Twain had abandoned this attitude. Writing to his friend Henry Rogers, Twain maintained that he was willing to try anything to cure his daughter, “except Christian Science” (qtd. in Willis 251). This prohibition may be due, in part, to the details of Susy's death. After she contracted meningitis, Susy's treatment was delayed to allow a mind healer to attempt a cure first. Medical doctors were not better prepared to combat her disease, however, and she died on August 18, 1896.

Science against one another, Twain finds that Eddy's religion actually comes out ahead (*Christian Science* 49). Twain makes an effort to show himself rational and fair-minded. He goes so far as to say that Christian Science not only heals disease (though that miracle is now commonplace in modern medicine), it seems to genuinely heal the soul as well (195). Any legitimate help in relieving hurt cannot be overlooked in the pain economy.

Even Twain's generosity towards the religion, however, turns out to be a weapon he can use against Eddy. The ideas of Christian Science are *so* true as to be self-evident, Twain argues, yet Mary Baker Eddy treats them as if they were her own personal inventions. Twain suggests that the healing of Christian Science is the original Biblical power—he calls it “gracious and beautiful: the power, through loving mercifulness and compassion, to heal fleshly ills and pains and griefs—*all*—with a word, with a touch of the hand!” (*Christian Science* 207). Milmine, too, finds Christian Science unoriginal, briefly highlighting George Berkeley (28: 213) and, at much greater length, the work of Phineas P. Quimby as the source of Eddy's ideas on material unreality and mental healing. Twain claims to have objective proof that Eddy's mode of healing was in effect long before the founding of her religion:

January, 1903. I have personal and intimate knowledge of the “miraculous” cure of a case of paralysis which had kept the patient helpless in bed during two years, in spite of all that the best medical science of New York could do. The traveling “quack” (that is what they called him) came on two successive mornings and lifted the patient out of bed and said “Walk!” and the patient walked. That was the end of it. It was forty-one years ago. The patient has walked ever since.—M. T. (*Christian Science* 27-28)

The “patient” was Livy Langdon. The history of her illness and recovery was part of the family gospel, and its veracity, coming from the author’s revered wife, was unquestionable.

Twain had marked Eddy as a total villain, and no evidence to the contrary was welcome. Twain needed to make Eddy’s one virtue—a plausible and beneficial set of ideas—a vice. He needed to separate her from her teachings. “What is the origin of Christian Science?” asks Twain’s injured narrator from the opening chapter of *Christian Science*. “Is it a gift of God, or did it just happen?” (14). The Christian Science doctor answers the question with the accepted truth of her faith: “In a sense, it is a gift of God. That is to say, its powers are from Him, but the credit of the discovery of the powers and what they are for is due to an American lady.” Milmine explains that Eddy treated all other mind healing as “dangerous and harmful,” insisting that “her own copyrighted variety of mind cure” was the be all and end all of healing (31: 188). If Twain wanted to break down her authority, and he did, he would need to address that “copyrighted variety of mind cure”—*Science and Health*—directly. He found himself up to the task.

Twain was well equipped to take apart the text of *Science and Health* with both professional expertise and biting humor. As if her simultaneous exploitation and negation of pain was not enough, Eddy cemented her poor reputation with Twain by practicing all of his literary pet peeves: “Self-complacency . . . Sentimentality . . . Affectations of scholarly learning . . . Metaphor gone insane . . .” and more, especially the misuse of words and overly ‘pretty’ phrasing (*Christian*

Science 97). Of her prose style, Twain writes, “This is not English—I mean, grown-up English. But it is fifteen-year-old English” (87). He contemptuously declares it a “sophomoric style.” Poor writing is hardly enough to undercut the entire religion, however, so Twain must dig deeper. Responding to the ongoing rumors and court cases surrounding Eddy and *Science and Health*, Twain explores the possibility that Christian Science is not Eddy’s invention at all.

Twain once described Eddy as “the sordid and ignorant old purloiner of that gospel,” meaning *Science and Health* (RR 343). In *Christian Science*, Twain compares the writing from several sections of *Science and Health* and finds them so dramatically different that he concludes they could not all have been written by the same person. “My readings of Mrs. Eddy’s uninspired miscellaneous literary efforts have convinced me of several things,” writes Twain:

1. That she did not write *Science and Health*.
2. That the Deity did (or did not) write it.
3. That She thinks She wrote it.
4. That She believes She wrote it under the Deity’s inspiration.
5. That She believes She is a Member of the Holy Family.
6. That She believes She is the equal of the Head of it. (*Christian Science* 110-11)

Ultimately, Twain concludes—after his sarcastic and ambiguous allowance that God “did (or did not)” write *Science and Health*—that someone else (an unnamed “he”) wrote the book and that Eddy added a preface and made it a religion after “he” died (213). The “he” Twain obliquely refers to is Phineas Parkhurst Quimby, Eddy’s sometime instructor in the art of mental healing. Quimby’s supporters argued that most of Eddy’s ideas are derivative of her teacher’s. “[H]ad there been no Dr.

Quimby there would have been no Mrs. Eddy,” claimed Quimby’s son, George (Dresser, *Quimby* 436). Even the phrase “Christian Science,” it turns out, was not original with Eddy (Milmine 28:345, Dresser, *Health* 239-40). The dispute over the origin of ideas eventually ended up in court, with Eddy suing former students for plagiarism of her ideas and then being countersued for plagiarizing from Quimby’s manuscripts. Her debt to other thinkers and teachers seemed, to Twain, indisputable.³⁹

The fact that Eddy was growing wealthy off of these ideas was irritating to Twain for two reasons. First, they were not her ideas. Second, the power of faith healing does not lie with the healer but with the patient. Twain compares the Christian Science healer to an engineer who releases the power of the steam to run the engine but who is not responsible for creating the power of either the machine or the steam (62). The healer merely “organizes” all the parts . . . and then charges for it. This was the major point of disillusionment for Twain. To charge a person for relief of pain, when it is they themselves who provided all the necessary power to accomplish the healing—this is patently unjust.

The final straw is that Eddy’s ideas undermine the capital of the pain economy—pain itself. “Matter has no existence,” the healer declares, sounding for a moment like No. 44 at the end of *The Mysterious Stranger*; “nothing exists but the mind; the mind cannot feel pain, it can only imagine it.”

“But if it hurts just the same,” interjects the wounded narrator.

³⁹ Note that when General Grant was faced with accusations of plagiarism and ghost-writing, Twain defended his honor vehemently.

“It doesn’t,” the healer returns. “A thing which is unreal cannot exercise the functions of reality. Pain is unreal; hence, pain cannot hurt” (*Christian Science* 8). If there is no pain, there are no debts to be settled, no accounts to balance. No one can be held liable for injustice or abuse, and no one can be compensated (except Eddy, who collects a fee for her services). There is no structure left on which humor can build. Eddy’s ideas about pain and reality were antithetical to Twain’s, and his attacks have in them a tone of self-defense.

Eddy might reject the materiality of pain, but not so Mark Twain. He framed his opinion of Eddy within the pain economy, drawing special attention to her acquisition of personal wealth and power through the work of the church. Twain objected vociferously to what he saw as Eddy’s conscious attempts “to convert a universal principle into a personal property,” as Milmine puts it (31: 188). The inherent ability of the mind to bring healing is not hers to sell. Moreover, it appeared to Twain that Eddy willingly benefitted from the pain of those around her. She does not deserve her wealth and power, he argues. She is no hero; “she is kin to us and one of us: sentimental as a girl, garrulous, ungrammatical, incomprehensible, affected, vain of her little human ancestry, unstable, inconsistent, unreliable in statement, and naïvely and everlastingly self-contradictory—oh, trivial and common and commonplace as the commonest of us!” (*Christian Science* 201-02). Every moment that she, a flawed and petty human like the rest of us, remains voluntarily enshrined, she adds to her debts.

How is it that a woman of her meager qualifications could have such absolute power and fantastic wealth? Twain believed that her genius was in self-promotion, and that she had been angling for this kind of social supremacy all along.

From the very beginning she was always in the front seat when there was business to be done; in the front seat, with both eyes open, and looking sharply out for Number One; in the front seat, working Mortal Mind with fine effectiveness and giving Immortal Mind a rest for Sunday. (*Christian Science* 119)

Twain makes it his project to show Eddy as more of a capitalist than a spiritual leader. For one thing, Christian Science has no charities and makes no contributions made to any other charitable groups (55). For another, they charge too much for Eddy's book, *Science and Health*. The Trust, as Twain calls the leadership of the church, argue that it is a fair price when compared to other books for sale in bookstores, but Twain criticizes the price *because* it is average, arguing that the church ought to be a mission, not a business (185). The Trust, therefore, has one purpose, Twain concludes: to increase profit. "Sly? Deep? Judicious?" Twain remarks of them. "The Trust understands its business. The Trust does not give itself away" (57). Every element of the church is tainted with the pursuit of money. "[E]verything it has is for sale. And the terms are cash; and not only cash, but cash in advance. Its god is Mrs. Eddy first, then the Dollar. Not a spiritual Dollar, but a real one" (51). Twain delights in catching them in their own traps. The material world that they shun so adamantly seems to matter, after all.

Twain was critical of Eddy's apparent gains in personal wealth, but he seemed genuinely afraid that she would acquire unprecedented political power.

Eddy's strong character and position of power made Twain (and others) uncomfortable. As Twain saw it, her path was climbing towards something higher than just a lavish lifestyle. She was aiming for world domination. "I think she wants [money] now to increase and establish and perpetuate her power and glory with, not to add to her comforts and luxuries, not to furnish paint and fuss and feathers for vain display" (*Christian Science* 146). Money is just part of the equation, however. She must also create a system that will perpetuate power. Twain lays out the qualities in a movement that enable it to conquer the world: it must be a religion (not merely a philosophy) that improves on an existing religion, it must deliver power and money to a small "clique" that has no oversight, and it must provide a new person to worship (*Christian Science* 38-39). It has been done before—Twain cites Islam as an example—and he feels certain Eddy will accomplish total power with her new religion. The results will be disastrous:

It was out of powers approaching Mrs. Eddy's—though not equaling them—that the Inquisition and the devastations of the Interdict grew. . . . Vast concentrations of irresponsible power have never in any age been used mercifully, and there is nothing to suggest the Christian Science Papacy is going to spend money on novelties. . . . There *is* no prophecy in our day but history. But history is a trustworthy prophet. (*Christian Science* 154)

Twain breaks out all his worst comparisons for Eddy's imaginary reign as a world leader. He compares Eddy's position as "Pastor Emeritus"—a title she claimed after resigning active duty as a pastor in her Boston church—to the Czar of Russia granting nominal constitutional power to the Duma while retaining all real power. Czar Nicholas II may as well call himself the "Emperor Emeritus" for all the

difference it would make (120). Twain felt that neither Eddy nor the Czar were really surrendering power at all. Twain lists the ways that, despite her resignation as pastor, Eddy retains sole power over church members—she can remove offending members without proving them guilty, she can make unopposed nominations for leadership positions, she forbids any interpretation of scripture other than her own, etc. Whether the comparison to the Czar is apt or not, Twain is careful to keep Eddy in what he felt to be appropriate company.⁴⁰ He saw Eddy not only as a villain but a tyrant. By 1940, he predicted with doomsday gloom, Christian Science would have political control of the entire country (*Christian Science* 53). He was wrong, of course, but it was a dystopia he felt certain could develop under Eddy's despotic leadership.

Twain played out his fantasy about such a world in "The Secret History of Eddypus." He tells of a future world wholly under the control of Christian Science. Eddy has manipulated a kind of immortality by setting up a papacy in which every new Pope takes her name, her dress, and her role as head of the church "to the end that My Name and the worship of It shall abide in the earth until the Last Day" ("Secret History" 320). Twain even imagines that, eventually, Christian Science and Roman Catholicism merge into one, all-powerful political entity, the "World Empire."

⁴⁰ Twain not only compares Eddy to other villains; he compares her to his heroes as well, though less favorably. In *Christian Science*, Twain explains that the main difference between Eddy and Joan of Arc is that Joan's words and actions perfectly reveal her pure motives, while Eddy's words and actions are inscrutable and therefore suspect (77). Later, he sarcastically ascribes to her "General Grant's luck" in the fact that her avarice and charismatic leadership did not emerge until "Circumstance and Opportunity" were right to propel her to power (191).

Twain casts himself in the story as “Mark Twain, Bishop of New Jersey,” a martyr for truth and resistance against the rule of Mary Baker Eddy. He creates his own religion, based on the teachings of “What Is Man?” but he is hanged, sometime between A.M. (*Anno Matris*, the Year of Our Mother) 47 and A.M. 70 (336-37). His book is one of the only non-Eddy-approved texts to survive to A.M. 1001 when “The Secret History of Eddypus” is set. The reign of the Mary Baker Eddies ensures the destruction of all culture and history except that under the direct control of Christian Science. Perhaps most significantly, the future readers of Mark Twain no longer find him funny. Humor, as Twain knew it, has totally passed away under Eddy’s reign. All that is left is one monotonous tyranny.

So far, Mark Twain has painted his villainess as an untalented plagiarist, a money-grubbing capitalist, and an aspiring dictator. He has one final charge to launch at her: Mary Baker Eddy wants to be God. Pointing to the worship of her person and portrait by Christian Scientists, Twain worries that Eddy will soon become elevated to the status of Christ or Pope (*Christian Science* 36). Eddy behaves so tyrannically, with so much confidence in her actions, thinks Twain, that she must be a god. We should remember that Twain calling someone “god-like” is no compliment.

Twain is uncomfortable with any person—divine or otherwise—receiving unthinking worship from others. He does not mind such things in characters like Joan of Arc because she shrinks from the adoration of her followers. Not so, Mary Baker Eddy. “Any healthy-minded person who will examine Mrs. Eddy’s little

Autobiography and the Manual of By-laws written by her will be convinced that she worships herself" (*Christian Science* 177). It is, to Twain, a self-evident fact that she intends to be worshipped by other as well. It is part of her very being—a literal hunger, even gluttony: "Once more I seem to recognize in her exactly the same appetite for self-deification that I have for pie" (256). He scours her writing for evidence that Eddy intends to make herself a god. Twain hunts up an example of a passage in which she gives a series of examples using the Virgin Mary, Jesus, and herself; he assumes she places them in order of ascending importance (108). He is certain that she considers herself at least equal with Christ, if not superior. Eddy, of course, denied Twain's insinuations vehemently.

Verbal denial was a poor defense in Twain's mind. As far as he could see, Eddy made no material efforts to squelch the veneration she claimed to disdain. Her followers had enshrined her portrait, her chair, and other relics of her life, but she did nothing to prevent them from continuing their worship. If a museum had been built for Jesus in his lifetime, argues Twain,

I believe He would put that Chair in the fire, and the bell along with it; and I think He would make the show-woman go away. I think He would break those electric bulbs, and the "mantelpiece of pure onyx," and say reproachful things about the golden drain-pipes of the lavatory, and give the costly rug of duck-breasts to the poor, and sever the satin ribbon and invite the weary to rest and ease their aches in the consecrated chairs. (*Christian Science* 179-80)

Twain concludes that Eddy rather likes to believe that she is something more than human. She is the Biblical Eve (not Twain's), who is tempted by the promise of the snake: "You will not die . . . you will be like God" (Gen. 3:5).

Perhaps because she seems to accept her prosperity and power so easily, Twain cannot believe that Eddy is capable of being anything like his moral heroes—humble, suffering, and selfless. Instead, he sees her as the *über* villain: luring those in pain to her, demanding their adoration, and exploiting their suffering for the sake of her own advancement. Perhaps this is the defining feature of Twain's villains—they seek the pedestal of the heroes, but they lift their human flaws up with them and so shame us all. They leave Twain with this one regret: "Often it does seem such a pity that Noah and his party did not miss the boat" (*Christian Science* 146).

The villains in charge

The ideals of American democracy were extremely important to Twain. If practiced correctly, he believed, it was the system most likely to minimize imbalance of power and suffering. For Twain, politics go beyond blasé debates about taxes or postmaster appointments. Political actions hold deep moral import. Twain had little patience for politicians. Prone to pursuing political advantage despite (or by means of) the suffering, loss, or embarrassment incurred by others along the way, politicians often fall afoul of the pain economy. But elected officials are not the only political villains. Too often, the over-sympathetic public is willing to be manipulated into whatever belief or action serves the politics of the popular man. Twain takes note of this. The audience who excuses sin is just as deserving of punishment as the villain who commits it.

Through the sister sins of party loyalty and patriotism, the voter supports the larger, more egregious sins of the politician. In “Man’s Place in the Animal World,” Twain explains why humankind is really the lowest of all the animals. Patriotism falls between slavery and religion in the list of human shortcomings.

Man is the only Patriot. He sets himself apart in his own country, under his own flag, and sneers at other nations, and keeps multitudinous uniformed assassins on hand at heavy expense to grab slices of other people’s countries, and keep *them* from grabbing slices of *his*. And in the intervals between campaigns he washes the blood off his hands and works for “the universal brotherhood of man”—with his mouth. (211)

The patriot can mouth niceties and practice atrocities without a sense of the irony because he or she has relegated thinking to someone else. “The Patriot did not know just how or when or where he got his opinions, neither did he care, so long as he was with what seemed the majority—which was the main thing, the safe thing, the comfortable thing” (477). Citizens receive their instructions obediently, whether the dictating voice is an emperor or an elected official. Even when some speck of conscience remains in a person, it is overpowered by the need for political safety. “The newspaper-and-politician-manufactured Patriot often gags in private over his dose; but he takes it, and keeps it on his stomach the best he can. Blessed are the meek” (476). We nod along with his words, thinking of our enemies, not ourselves. But Twain intends his words for all of us.

Political conformity, whether a person is submitting to party or nation, opens the door to corruption and hypocrisy. “This is an honest nation—in private life,” Twain says wryly.

The American Christian is a straight and clean and honest man, and in his private commerce with his fellows can be trusted to stand faithfully by the principles of honor and honesty imposed upon him by his religion. But the moment he comes forward to exercise a public trust he can be confidently counted upon to betray that trust in nine cases out of ten, if "party loyalty" shall require it. (*Christian Science* 262)

All kinds of conformity look the same to Twain. "Patriotism is merely a religion," he writes ("As Regards" 476). Patriotism and party loyalty may be handed down by newspapers and politicians instead of bibles and preachers, but they are trained into people just the same. At times, political and religious teachers join forces to craft a complete submission to their ideas. Harris notes that terms like "freedom," "liberty," and "rights" were often linked to religious purposes at the turn into the twentieth century and were used by religion and political speakers alike (*God's Arbiters* 32). New England historians in the nineteenth century had created "founding narratives" of the United States that feature Puritan figures, religious exemplars, focusing on "the moral character of the national subject in relation to current events" (S. Harris, "Christian Mission" 39). Anyone following the political conversation today will realize that those narratives about the founding principles of the United States remain in our consciousness. The revision of history for political purposes is nothing new.

Ever since he was a child, Twain had always wanted politics to be free of self-interest. After trying on several party affiliations, Twain ended up a Mugwump. James Leonard points out that this is basically the grown-up version of the Anti-Doughnut party of Twain's youth. The Anti-Doughnut party was formed to protest

the use of doughnuts as bribes in the elections to office in the Cadets of Temperance. Years later, as a Mugwump, Twain declared that he would make up his own mind about the political candidates, regardless of party, patronage, or popularity. A Mugwump cared only for a candidate's character, not his loyalty to this group or that. Mugwumps, the anti-party party as Leonard calls them, stood by the assertion that it was better not to vote at all than to disregard one's moral compass to vote the party line (103). It was the one virtue Twain allowed himself. He was very proud of his rejection of partisanship and mindless nationalism. He speaks of his own resolve to separate himself from loyalties to party, nation, and church with the language of faith. "And in this independence I have found a spiritual comfort and a peace of mind quite above price," he writes (*AI* 316). He himself, and no one else, is the only person "privileged to construct my patriotism for me" (317). In his mind, this was the highest form of self-determination, the pinnacle of democracy. He considered himself in the minority.

Twain's speech, "Consistency," delivered in 1887 to the Monday Evening Club in Hartford, scorns party loyalists—a barb intended for his audience, largely Republican businessmen and intellectuals, who chose to support James Blaine as Republican nominee for president, even though they knew him to be a scoundrel and had spoken against him up until the moment of his nomination. They fear being called traitors, but Twain argues that a change in party affiliation is not a sign of a man's inconsistency. True consistency is the ability to change—it is the law of adaptability in nature and the natural course of every life, from infancy to adulthood.

But two areas of modern life punish change: politics and religion. If a man is inwardly compelled to convert from Baptist to Buddhist, Twain argues, he would be a traitor to himself if he did not do it (910). In his complaint about the condition of party politics, Twain borrows language from the most intense moral crisis of his time: slavery.

Is it possible for human wickedness to invent a doctrine more infernal and poisonous than this? Is there *imaginable* a baser servitude than it imposes? What slave is so degraded as the slave who is *proud* that he *is* a slave? What is the *essential difference* between a life-long *Democrat* and any other kind of life-long *slave*? Is it less humiliating to dance to the lash of *one* master than *another*? (“Consistency” 912)

This may sound like gross hyperbole, and it is—Twain did not give racial injustice a fair accounting in the pain economy. Still, the strength of his language reveals the vehemence with which he condemned anyone who would trade personal convictions for political advantage. Twain felt that the honor of the human race (or at least that of American men) was at stake: “I am persuaded—convinced—that this idea of *consistency*—unchanging allegiance to *party*—has lowered the manhood of the whole *nation*—pulled it down and dragged it in the mud” (913). His solution, of course, was Mugwumperry—independent thought. The problem, and Twain grapples with it over and over again, lies in the fact that wholly independent, rational thought is an illusion. Twain’s “gospel” of determinism, his repeated exhortations on the power of “training,” his long meditations on the irresistible power of human nature—these show a man unconvinced that his ideal is even possible.

In “Corn-Pone Opinions,” Twain uses Jerry, a young black man who preaches mock sermons from atop a woodpile, to voice his complaint. Jerry lectures his audience, “You tell me whar a man gits his corn-pone, en I’ll tell you what his ‘pinions is” (507). Twain sums up Jerry’s message thus: “a man is not independent, and cannot afford views which might interfere with his bread and butter” (507). Expanding on the idea, Twain argues that people do not actively choose to conform their ideas to what is popular or profitable. We are slaves to our need for approval, whether from ourselves or our neighbors. For a man like Jerry, who is literally enslaved, external approval could very well be a matter of life and death, but Twain is not thinking in sympathy with Jerry. In his analysis of human nature, Twain seems to ignore the practical concerns of the slave, whose survival may depend on the ability to mask his honest opinions about the world around him. Twain names conscious suppression of opinion for the sake of increased prosperity the “a sordid business interest—the bread-and-butter interest” (510). In contrast to “bread-and-butter interest,” there are those who adopt popular opinions on fashion, table manners, and petty politics without any intention of self-benefit but simply because they were born into a particular community. Twain’s point is that these people adjust to the popular custom by instinct, not by choice.

Though Twain distinguishes instinctual conformists from the more self-conscious, self-interested chameleons, he does not respect them any more than the latter, especially when it comes to politics. Although Twain claims to believe that

thinking for oneself is impossible, still he turns up his nose at those who cannot do it.

If they boast of their reasoning skills, he is even more critical:

Men think they think upon great political questions, and they do; but they think with their party, not independently; they read its literature, but not that of the other side; they arrive at convictions, but they are drawn from a partial view of the matter in hand and are of no particular value. They swarm with their party, they feel with their party, they are happy in their party's approval; and where the party leads they will follow, whether for right and honor, or through blood and dirt and a mush of mutilated morals. ("Corn-Pone" 511).

The graphic image of "mutilated morals," in tandem with his equating political loyalty with slavery, indicates that Twain saw conformity as a truly dangerous practice.

Just how harmful is apparent in the unpublished essay, "The United States of Lyncherdom." Moral bravery is a quality found in maybe one in ten thousand people, Twain claims ("Lyncherdom" 481). Everyone else falls into the vast majority who, though secretly repulsed by violence such as lynching, remain silent in effort to maintain the good opinion of their neighbors. Twain obviously despises such cowardice, but he is frank about how common a trait it is. "We are not any better nor any braver than anybody else," he scolds the reader, "and we must not try to creep out of it" (483). In this admission, Twain plays the familiar game of self-condemnation, which sweeps up the reader, the author, and everyone we know in its totality.

The universal nature of our moral cowardice means that political villainy crops up in every nation around the world. Built into human nature, it appears also

in human constructions, including the very idea of “civilization.” Twain tries to parse out our common delusion. “What *is* a civilization, rightly considered? Morally, it is the evil passions repressed, the level of conduct raised; spiritually, idols cast down, God enthroned; materially, bread and fair treatment for the greatest number. That is the common formula, the common definition; everybody accepts it is satisfied with it” (*BA* 75). But in reality civilization amplifies both the greatest and the most terrible aspects of human nature, pushing us to the limits of invention *and* corruption. Frequently, the “civilized” believe themselves to be somehow above their “savage,” “heathen,” or “primitive” neighbors, but Twain knows differently. Under our civilized and sympathetic morality lies violence and cruelty—even Hank Morgan, who strives to temper Camelot’s medieval backwardness with modern justice—gives his permission for the band to be killed for playing a song that annoys him (*Halliday* 425).

Of course, Twain had his favorite villains. Because Twain’s moral sensibilities are built on the moral foundations of “Care/harm” and “Fairness/cheating,” to borrow language from Haidt, monarchies and other hierarchical governmental systems were especially repellent to the author. It was a system implicitly unfair and ungente. Furthermore, the natural sympathy between the monarchy and the church spoke ill of both institutions. A reformer, says Twain, might be praised for dispensing with the church, but a king who passes up the additional power tendered by a state religion is unfit to rule. The Hawaiian king, Liholiho, for instance, was a fool to phase out the native religion.

This Church was a horrid thing. It heavily oppressed the people; it kept them always trembling in the gloom of mysterious threatenings; it slaughtered them in sacrifice before its grotesque idols of wood and stone; it cowed them, it terrorized them, it made them slaves to its priests, and through the priests to the king. It was the best friend a king could have, and the most dependable. (*FE* 442)

If the monarchy's main purpose is to maintain total control over its subjects and manipulate them for personal gain, the church is a perfect ally.

Twain knew plenty of other monarchs who welcomed the power of a state church. In "The Czar's Soliloquy" (1905), Twain juxtaposes two newspaper clippings, one reporting recent brutalities perpetrated by the Russian army on Polish civilians, the other describing the religious preparations made by people of Novgorod for the visit of the czar, "the Lord's Anointed" (646). Both events occur under the power of the monarchy. Czar Nicholas II was a pious man, and his rule was closely associated with the Russian Orthodox Church. The national anthem of Russia called for God's protection of the "Orthodox Czar," and Nicholas and his family are today recognized as passion-bearers, saints, and martyrs in various branches of the Orthodox Church. Yet it was not the man himself, Twain is keen to point out, that was powerful or holy. The Czar laughs that he himself, standing naked before his mirror, has any power at all: "*I—this thing in the mirror—this carrot!*" (646). His title, the worship of his people, his word as law—these are the trappings of an unbalanced system. These are the emperor's new clothes.

The basic flaw of a hierarchical government is that it provides no mechanism to check the cruelty of an individual with power. And, as Twain knew, human nature

was prone to cruelty even without the temptations of power. The Czar is, at his simplest, just a man—which is bad enough a thing to be. Yet his power is real. His presence *does* command worship, and his word can kill. Rather than learn a lesson about undeserved power and move towards some semblance of humility, the Czar turns gratefully back to his clothes—“respect-reviving, spirit-uplifting clothes! Heaven’s kindest gift to man, his only protection against finding himself out: they deceive him, they confer dignity upon him; without them he has none” (647). What politician would choose otherwise?

But even “good” politicians can’t overcome the evils of an inherently imbalanced system. Two of Twain’s novels—*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* and *The Prince and the Pauper*—deal directly with “good” kings caught within a “bad” monarchy. The latter is so generally innocuous that Twain’s criticisms of the monarchy are nearly indiscernible. Some critics, like Budd, note that *The Prince and the Pauper* is somewhat ambiguous on questions of class distinctions and hierarchy. But Edward Tudor *does* take concrete steps to correct the errors of the monarchical law. Disguised as a pauper, Edward witnesses the gross disproportion of crime and punishment; once he is restored to his throne, he institutes a law that favors fairness over cruelty, Twain tells us. “The world is made wrong,” Edward Tudor declares; “kings should go to school to their own laws, at times, and so learn mercy” (*Prince and the Pauper* 170). In his notes for the chapter, however, Twain includes examples of disproportionate punishments being practiced in the years after Edward’s reign. Even a good-hearted leader cannot totally amend the faults innate in hierarchical

government. Indeed, in the second-to-last sentence of the book, Twain qualifies Edward's reign as "a singularly merciful one for those harsh times" (206). Future monarchs would not be privileged to witness the pain purchased by their pleasure, and so mercy would end with Edward.

In *Connecticut Yankee*, Twain again provides a good-hearted king ultimately unable to dispense with the cruelties of his monarchy. Even Hank Morgan, an outside reformer, cannot touch the immensity of pain abuse systemic in monarchy. Initially, he approaches the court with the confidence of a proper Yankee. "But as the satiric impulse comes to the fore, the surprise, bewilderment, and amusement with which Morgan had originally beheld the Arthurian world are displaced by the indignation he feels upon discovering the atrocities at the heart of chivalry" (Cox 205). It is an inevitable realization. Hank likes Arthur; he finds him to be a true, if simple-minded, man. But monarchy is a villainous system, even if its head is not himself an evil man.

When the man himself is evil, of course, the moral imbalance tips beyond the hope of restitution. The evil leader, however, implicates the entire system: without systemic support, his power to harm would be insignificant. "King Leopold's Soliloquy," written in the same year as "The Czar's Soliloquy," has an even darker plot and a deeper significance for American readers. Although Twain is obviously critical of Leopold himself, he widens his censure to include European leaders and President Arthur who, at the Berlin Conference, became compliant in Leopold's actions when they recognized the Congo as legitimately under Belgian control.

“Pirate flag?” muses Leopold on the insults tossed at his country by Americans. “Let them call it so—perhaps it is. All the same, *they were the first to salute it*” (662).

Twain does not stop there, however. He also draws God into the guilty group. Leopold sees himself as “a king whose acts cannot be criticized without blasphemy, since God has observed them from the beginning and has manifested no dissatisfaction with them, nor interrupted them in any way” (663). The text is framed by two quotations printed in the form of a cross, and we frequently see King Leopold kissing his crucifix throughout the soliloquy. God’s name has been invoked loudly, so his silence reads as tacit approval. Absolute sovereignty is absolute responsibility for God and king alike. “My traducers do not forget to remark that, inasmuch as I am absolute and with a word can prevent in the Congo anything I choose to prevent,” Leopold whines, “then whatsoever is done there by my permission is my act, my *personal* act; that *I* do it” (673). The horrible details of the suffering in the Belgian Congo are made worse by Leopold’s cold response. He tries to recalculate the burden of pain and repayment, sure his religious efforts, his support of art and culture, must count for something—but no one seems to recognize his efforts, he pouts. Isn’t saving a person’s soul worth more than can be measured in mere physical pain? Twain leaves no doubt about the answer. In the pain economy, the nebulous promise of a heavenly reward has little if any value.

Naturally, Twain is not satisfied to simply find a villain and pour out all his pent up venom on his head alone. The people bear some burden of blame. Like Czar Nicholas, Leopold scoffs at the attempt of the people to bring a civilized approach to

his gruesome rampages. “[J]ust when you think [society] is going to throw a brick,—it heaves a poem!” he laughs (679). It is a strangely hypocritical accusation, coming from Twain. After all, what is he doing if not making his assault with mere language? “If men were really *men*,” Leopold smirks, “how could a Czar be possible? and how could I be possible? But we *are* possible; we are quite safe; and with God’s help we shall continue the business at the old stand” (679). When teaching Twain’s anti-imperialist writings, one of the complaints my students bring to me is that they can be “repetitious” and tiresome. This, I think, is actually part of Twain’s point. King Leopold even draws attention to it. Flipping through the pamphlets and articles describing his atrocities, he sighs, “It is all the same old thing—tedious repetitions and duplications of shop-worn episodes; mutilations, murders, massacres, and so on, and so on, till one gets drowsy over it” (681). It is discomfort with no payoff, and people will grow tired of it. They will push it away, eventually. They will turn off the news and find something else to do—something that will pay.

The monarchy, of course, is not the only form of government responsible for villainous abuses. The problem may be less with the form of power and more with power itself. “Power, when lodged in the hands of man, means oppression—*insures* oppression: it means oppression *always*: not always consciously, deliberately, purposely; not always severely, or heavily or cruelly, or sweepingly; but *oppression*, anyway, and *always*, in one shape or another,” Twain told the Hartford Monday Evening Club in 1886 (“New Dynasty” 883). Laws protect “the few: the king, the capitalist, and a handful of other overseers and superintendents,” while they

oppress “the many: The nations of the earth, the valuable personages; the workers; they that MAKE the bread that the soft-handed and the idle eat” (884). The serf, the servant, and the railroad worker all share in the pain of power abused.

Political power amplifies human greed and malice as much as it encourages our ingenuity or our sense of justice. By naming it something good—“patriotism” or “loyalty”—we create the thinnest of veils behind which the darker side of human nature lurks. Twain wanted to believe that the benefits of civilization were real, but experience would not let the illusion stand. Leonard writes, “Politics was a game for him—a wholesome one when played well, but prone to being subverted by the corruption of those who did not adequately respect its role or by the ignorance and general worthlessness of an electorate not up to the task of government ‘by the people’” (94). The names of respectability were no longer enough for Twain. He was weighing the actions of his nation on the same scales he used for his publishers and his characters, and they measured only pain, not pretty words.

“A Word of Encouragement for Our Blushing Exiles,” written in 1898 but not published in Twain’s lifetime, addresses an American who is in “voluntary exile” in Europe because he is so ashamed of the conduct in the Spanish-American War, Twain challenges the premise of the exile’s embarrassment. Trying to imagine why the American disapproves of the reluctance of the U.S. to give up control of Cuba, he speculates: “And finally you are ashamed of all this because it is new, and base, and brutal, and dishonest; and because Europe, having had no previous experience of such things, is horrified by it and can never respect us nor associate with us any

more" (260). Of course, "all this" is *not* new, though it may be "base, and brutal, and dishonest." Like Jesus in the book of John⁴¹ with his oft-repeated "let him who is without sin cast the first stone," Twain's words are a double-edged sword. Russia, France, and Spain are just as guilty as the United States (perhaps even more so) of the exact crimes the exile notes with particular embarrassment. Twain stops short of an admonition to "go and sin no more"—there is no hope of that. But by taking away the exile's cause for special shame on account of his country, Twain also disputes any claim to special honor. This is a game that all play alike. Politics assumes an imbalance in the pain economy and tries to sway the advantage of that imbalance to oneself. There are rules to politics, but they do not really do much to protect the powerless. "In statesmanship get the formalities right, never mind about the moralities," reads the Chapter LXV epigram in *Following the Equator* (841). The nation and its representatives are devoted to the idea of their country above all others. Any apparent moral superiority is just an illusion.

Because the United States was *his* country, and because its sins pained *him* personally, Twain saves his most specific criticism for American politicians. "It could probably be shown by facts and figures that there is no distinctly native American criminal class except Congress," Twain famously said (*FE* 474). Twain's condemnation of Congress was hardly radical in his time, and it still resonates today, with Congress now rating below cockroaches and traffic jams in popular opinion.

⁴¹ See John 8:1-11

Twain's 1868 story, "Cannibalism in the Cars," is part tall tale, part dream narrative, part Congressional allegory. The story comes through the frame of a conversation between two men on a train—the original narrator and "a mild, benevolent-looking gentleman of about forty-five, or may be fifty" (269). The stranger is extremely interested by the fact that the narrator comes from Washington, D.C., and they chat about "the ins and outs of political life at the Capital." The man's eyes light up at the mention of the name "Harris," and he begins to tell the narrator a story. The stranger's tale recollects a train journey that was halted by a blizzard somewhere between St. Louis and Chicago. After seven days without rescue or supplies, the men in the car are starving, tired, and desperate. Here, the man's story turns from straight narrative entirely to dialogue. Each speaker's name appears in capital letters, followed by his state of origin, mimicking the Congressional record. Hungry and despairing of rescue, the train passengers (mock-Congressmen) make the dire jump to cannibalism and begin arguing about "which of us shall die to furnish food for the rest!" (272). Their conversation is jarringly formal as they consider the merits of each candidate and weigh personal loyalties against personal benefit: a dramatic characterization of the genteel gloss that government puts on barbarous, ruthless actions. The sacrifices literally feed the body politic, the election of a man is his doom.

Once the cannibalism begins, there is no sense of moderation; the mock-Congress elects a man for every meal, not waiting for starvation to force another choice. The survivors are growing fatter and fatter on their companions, feeling

more comfortable than ever. “How changed we were from what we had been a few short hours before! Hopeless, sad-eyed misery, hunger, feverish anxiety, desperation, then—thankfulness, serenity, joy too deep for utterance now. That I know was the cheeriest hour of my eventful life” (“Cannibalism” 275). This relief is purchased by the death of others, but there is no sense of guilt or regret in the man’s account.

It is not a terribly surprising revelation, after the man gets off at his stop, to learn that the stranger was once a member of Congress. He *had* been caught in a snowdrift one winter, but there seems to be no evidence that he ate anyone. Still, he keeps on with his story, the conductor tells our original narrator, and eats his fellow passengers time and time again. “He would have finished the crowd by this time, only he had to get out here” (277). The narrator is happy for an excuse to disbelieve what he had just heard: “I felt inexpressibly relieved to know that I had only been listening to the harmless vagaries of a madman, instead of the genuine experiences of a bloodthirsty cannibal” (277). The irony, of course, is that the man’s brutal cannibalism was very real, only it happened in Congress, not on a train. He confused the two parts of his life in his story, but because Congressmen do not literally eat people, their daily carnage is shrugged off as harmless.

The story is a neat summation of Twain’s attitude about politics. Twain truly believed that a man’s election was the same as his destruction. “Always he maintained that no man could fill a high official position in the government without succumbing to corrupting temptations, in some small degree at least,” writes Clara

Clemens (273-74). Corruption was an inevitable result of politics, Twain believed. As Justin Kaplan describes it, corruption was an essential American quality in the nineteenth century. Unchecked corporate power, open bribery, deceptive bookkeeping, and the like were the norm in American politics (Kaplan 156-57). Hartford was, by no means, exempt from this trend, Kaplan explains. He cites, for example, “Henry Ward Beecher’s public conduct in accepting a fee of a thousand dollars to endorse a truss or, on another occasion, in accepting fifteen thousand dollars’ worth of stock from Jay Cooke in return for publishing favorable editorials in the *Christian Union* about the Northern Pacific” (157). Politics is a morality game, but the rules do not stipulate that the person professing the morals actually adhere to them.

Twain, having lived and worked in Washington, bore witness to the game being played, and he had plenty to say about it. It was while living in Hartford that Twain, collaborating with his neighbor Charles Dudley Warner, wrote his most memorable piece of political satire, *The Gilded Age*. Members of Congress get a universally bad rap in the book. Col. Sellers describes the lot of them in droll apologia: “in a free country like ours, where any man can run for Congress and anybody can vote for him, you can’t expect immortal purity all the time—it ain’t in nature” (Twain and Warner 375). Purity, immortal or otherwise, is not a known quality of Congressmen. When we first enter the capital city with Twain,⁴² we learn that anyone suspected of being a member of Congress is treated with suspicion,

⁴² This and the following examples are drawn from chapters identified by Ron Powers as being written primarily by Twain, not Warner.

especially by boarding house landladies, who are overflowing with tales of being bilked by countless elected officials (173). The situation is no better on the Hill. Every vote is a bought vote. Costs added up: payments to committee members, lobbyists, and, of course, the added expense of buying off the “high moral Congressman or Senator here and there—the high moral ones cost more, because they give tone to a measure” (205). Furthermore, an initial appropriation must not be seen as a victory. We are expected to understand that any money released by Congress is claimed by Congress. The entire economy of Washington, moral and monetary alike, is subject to the whims of Congress.

Of course, Twain will not leave us with mere hearsay. Senator Dilworthy⁴³ is the book’s primary villain, and he fits the mold perfectly. With his mouth full of pieties and his pockets full of bribes, Dilworthy epitomizes everything Twain despises about politicians. Dilworthy uses his power and influence for his own profit alone, careless of the impact of his actions on the people he is sworn to represent. He takes the beautiful Laura Hawkins under his wing, scheming to make her “a peerless missionary in the field of labor he designed her for” (234). The religious tone of his vision belies his greedy purposes. Laura sees through Dilworthy’s disguise of noble intentions, but she is not eager to unmask him, since she sees personal profit in their collaboration. Under the auspices of “helping the negro,” Dilworthy is pushing a bill to purchase the burdensome and useless “Tennessee land”

⁴³ The character of Dilworthy is based on Senator Samuel Pomeroy of Kansas, a temperance supporter, Sunday school advocate, and Reconstruction Republican. Like Dilworthy, he was accused of bribery but was exonerated by the Senate committee, despite strong evidence of his guilt.

from the Hawkins family and establish “the Knobs Industrial University” open to all students, regardless of color or sex. Dilworthy teaches Laura his careful manner of doublespeak around the project:

I don't deny that it is for the interest of all of us that this bill should go through, and it will. I have no concealments from you. But I have one principle in my public life, which I should like you to keep in mind; it has always been my guide. I never push a private interest if it is not justified and ennobled by some larger public good. I doubt if a Christian would be justified in working for his own salvation if it was not to aid in the salvation of his fellow men. (259)

In other words, the appearance of morality is essential for him to successfully play the political game. Dilworthy can only achieve his unscrupulous plots while appearing upright. Otherwise, his plans fall to pieces. Tutored by Dilworthy, Laura passes on the advice to a Senator whose vote she is courting: “Wear this comely disguise of virtue before the public—it will count there; but here it is out of place” (303). She offers him Dilworthy’s “negro cause” as a cover for his payback from the bill, and he accepts. It is the way of Washington.

Twain loads Dilworthy with the language of righteousness and the actions of treachery—a perfect hypocrite. Dilworthy mounts up debt in the pain economy because he not only cheats his country, he deceives them, as well. He understands the rules of the pain economy, understands the desire in people to pity and reward the sufferer, and he exploits the impulse, as always, for his own gain. In a rare, honest moment, Dilworthy explains why he welcomes newspaper articles critical of his bill. He explains to Laura the value of his persecution:

The great public weak-minded; the great public is sentimental; the great public always turns around and weeps for an odious murderer, and prays for him, and carries flowers to his prison and besieges the governor with appeals to his clemency, as soon as the papers begin to howl for that man's blood.—In a word, the great putty-hearted public loves to 'gush,' and there is no such darling opportunity to gush as a case of persecution affords (316).

Dilworthy is right. His bill is denounced vehemently in the papers, and it passes the House.

For a moment, things begin to look a bit shaky for Dilworthy. His protégé, Laura, is accused of killing a man. His bill dies in the Senate, and he is publicly accused of corruption in an election year. But Dilworthy is saved by the fact that the game of appearances is systemic in Congress. When Congress wants to “purify” itself of corruption, it need only appear to do so until the public grows bored and stops paying attention. “Do you think a Congress of ours could convict the devil of anything if he were a member?” asks Washington Hawkins, when he learns of the underhanded maneuverings of his government (378). It does not convict Dilworthy, if that is any answer.

The sarcastic, jibing critique of Congress in *The Gilded Age* feels almost playful in comparison to the naked attack on American politics found in Twain's anti-imperialist writings of the early 1900s. Susan K. Harris notes that Twain had been drilled in the belief that America was “God's chosen country . . . held to a higher standard than the rest of the world” (*God's Arbiters* 21). Even when Twain had transitioned away from an abiding faith in God, his faith in the ideals of liberty and equality remained. Whatever idealism Twain still cherished about American politics

by 1899 (and it was limited) was shattered as he watched the United States betray the Filipino freedom fighters and take concrete steps towards becoming an imperialist power. The resulting Philippine-American War and the political maneuvers around it cemented the villainy of the political system once and for all.

Twain would change his opinion about American expansion several times as the world moved from the nineteenth into the twentieth century. “It is certainly true,” writes Scott Michaelsen, “that Twain’s original position on imperialism mutated from a Mugwump-inflected isolationism to . . . a brief championship of the view that the United States should serve as benevolent ‘protector’ of helpless and backward portions of the globe” (112). By the end, Twain was convinced that, whatever the potential for good, the American government had damned itself by its actions in the Philippines and Cuba. The U. S. military had initially supported the Filipino and Cuban armies in their fight for independence from Spain. Twain supported the move at first, seeing the war as a means of bringing American-style freedom and democracy to the people—but he was sorely disillusioned when he read the Treaty of Paris of 1898, which gave long-term control of the Philippines to the United States and left the Catholic church in power (S. Harris, *God’s Arbiters* 5). He was hard pressed to see anything but pure self-interest in this move.

The United States had much to gain from their occupation of the islands. The Philippines contained valuable natural resources and offered a prime location for commercial trade with Asia—as well as an advantageous spot for a new American military base. With the impending annexation of Hawaii, the Pacific region was just

beginning to open up for the United States. Rather than encouraging freedom, then, the United States was re-colonizing the Philippines for its own economic and political advantage. Twain recognized this move as an egregious violation of fair trade within the pain economy, even if it would further trade of different kinds. As John Carlos Rowe points out, free trade, which Twain touted as the solution to political ills in *Connecticut Yankee*, was now contributing to the imperialist frenzy, as countries were seeking friendly territories around the globe for ease of trading (183). In *God's Arbiters*, Harris's recent book on the Philippine-American War, she explains that American expansion beyond the Pacific had more to do with economic gain than political ideology. The façade of a humanitarian or noble principle was shaky at best. "[T]he rhetoric of democratic solidarity with aspiring third world democracies actually announced America's intention to make their economies work to its benefit," writes Harris ("Christian Mission" 41). To pursue political and economic gains under the guise of the democratic ideal was hateful to Twain. As he followed the war, Twain completed his disenchantment with the fable of American political idealism. Day after day, he read the news counting the number of Filipinos who, after fighting for their freedom from Spain, now died at the hands of the Americans who had promised to help them achieve independence. He would, from this point forward,⁴⁴ remain a staunch opponent of American imperialism.

⁴⁴ John Carlos Rowe disputes the idea that Twain's anti-imperialist sentiments are limited to 1898-1905. Although the specific terms that we associate with imperialism did not come into use until the late 1890s, Rowe sees evidence of Twain's political and moral judgments on the concepts in works such as *Connecticut Yankee*. (See Rowe's article "How the Boss Played the Game: Twain's Critique of

In the pain economy, hoarding a pleasure to oneself is as bad as doling out injury. Privileged with democracy, our advantage compels us to share it with those suffering under more restrictive forms of government. Harris maintains that, “despite the acerbity” of Twain’s criticisms, his disappointment with American imperialism is really a reflection of his belief in “the country’s mission” to better the lives of the oppressed people of the world by encouraging American-style self-government (*God’s Arbiters* 5). The moment the United States stopped calling Aguinaldo and his Filipino soldiers independence fighters and began calling them insurgents, that mission was abandoned. But within Twain’s moral judgment, no change in title could erase the obligation to better the lives of others. The balance of pain is not so easily weighted.

In the March 12, 1906,⁴⁵ dictations of his *Autobiography*, Twain takes up a specific piece of news from the Philippines. Reports are coming in of a “battle” between American forces and a group of six hundred Moros (indigenous Muslim Filipinos) who were hiding in a mountain crater. The numbers of the opposing sides are about equal, except that, on the Filipino side, many of the company are women and children, and their weapons are assumed to be grossly inferior, though the news report does not specify this point. At the end of a day and half of fighting, all six hundred Moros are killed, while only fifteen Americans have died. Twain takes it

Imperialism in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*.”) I largely agree with Rowe’s premise, though I will focus on Twain’s overtly anti-imperialist writings from this later period.

⁴⁵ The war had technically ended in 1902, but the islands proved difficult to conquer entirely. Pockets of resistance would remain undefeated well into the twentieth century, until the Philippines finally gained independence in 1946.

upon himself to do a mathematical reckoning between the two sides. The imbalance, he finds, is appalling. The soldiers had been told to “kill or capture” the people at will. They only killed. The American soldiers are valorized, with even the pettiest of wounds earning a soldier honorable mention (A1 404).

Twain imagines the Filipinos watching their kindred die around them while soldiers write letters home to their admiring families. He then goes back over history’s wars, recording the percentages of casualties on both sides and compares these numbers with this new massacre of the Moros. “The enemy numbered six hundred⁴⁶—including women and children—and we abolished them utterly, leaving not even a baby alive to cry for its dead mother. *This is incomparably the greatest victory that was ever achieved by the Christian soldiers of the United States*” (404). The uneven distribution of power and pain is damning. Whatever payoff the Filipinos may have earned, they have not lived to claim it, and so the United States must take on a permanent debt. But instead of owning its guilt, the country calls its sin righteousness and keeps right on spending Filipino suffering freely. The massacre of these helpless refugees, says Twain, “would not have been a brilliant feat of arms even if Christian American, represented by its salaried soldiers, had shot them down with Bibles and the Golden Rule instead of bullets” (405). The invocation of the Golden Rule is biting—“Do unto others what you would have them do unto you.” Twain has the soldiers load their guns and murder infants with the irony of their professed Christian morality.

⁴⁶ The number of dead is revised up to nine hundred in later reports.

Harris argues that Twain was more interested in restoring the “special mission” of the United States than destroying it—like other anti-imperialists, he felt that the annexation of the Philippines had failed it “special mandate from God to represent freedom an fair dealing to the rest of the world,” and he regretted the fact (*God’s Arbiters* 13, 54-55). If Twain were not invested in the role of the United States as harbinger of freedom, he would not be disappointed by its new role as colonial power. “A jeremiad accuses the community of having transgressed,” writes Harris, “then demands that the members repent and resume their mission to follow in the ways of God. The underlying assumption of the jeremiad form is that the community actual has a history of virtue from which it has fallen” (35). Mark Twain believed in some kind of redemption for his government, no matter how distant or improbable. So he sent a prophet to the people in “The War Prayer.”

“The War Prayer” concerns itself with a nation at war. “The country was up in arms, the war was on, in every breast burned the holy fire of patriotism” (652). It is the day before deployment, and one little town is cheering its newest batch of soldiers off to war. In church, “the pastors preached devotion to flag and country, and invoked the God of Battles, beseeching His aid in our good cause in outpourings of fervid eloquence which moved every listener” (652). The pastor pours out a prayer for the soldiers:

The burden of its supplication was, that the ever-merciful and benignant Father of us all would watch over our noble young soldiers, and aid, comfort and encourage them in their patriotic work; bless them, shield them in the day of battle and the hour of peril, bear them in His might hand, make them strong and confident, invincible in the

bloody onset, help them to crush the foe, grant to them and to their flag and country imperishable honor and glory— (653)

At this moment, one of Twain's troublesome mysterious strangers appears in the door, an old man with flowing robes and an uncanny presence. He claims to be a messenger from God, sent to teach them the whole meaning of what they ask for. Essentially, he sets out the rules of the pain economy. All good things have their price, and they must consider who is paying for it.

If you would beseech a blessing upon yourself, beware! lest without intent you invoke a curse upon a neighbor at the same time. If you pray for the blessing of rain upon your crop which needs it, by that act you are possibly praying for a curse upon some neighbor's crop which may not need rain and can be injured by it. (654)

The elderly stranger rephrases the prayer for the soldiers to reflect its true meaning. Praying for military victory like proper patriots, the people wish their sons away from the peace of their home to disrupt the peace of someone else's. The old man translates: "help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of their patriot dead; help us to drown the thunder of the guns with the shrieks of their wounded, writhing in pain" (654).

Twain provocatively plants the word "patriot" in reference to the enemy, emphasizing the universality of the patriotic spirit, noble or otherwise. Twain used this tactic frequently when writing about the imperialist wars of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In Chapter XXXV of *Following the Equator*, Twain happens upon a monument to British soldiers who died in wars with the Maori. The monument honors soldiers "who fell in defence of law and order against fanaticism

and barbarism” (623). Twain objects viscerally to the use of the word “fanaticism” and hopes it is a careless error. “Patriotism is Patriotism,” he declares.

Calling it Fanaticism cannot degrade it; nothing can degrade it. Even though it be a political mistake, and a thousand times a political mistake, that does not affect it; it is honorable—always honorable, always noble—and privileged to hold its head up and look the nations in the face. (623)

When we look at Twain’s other writings about patriotism, it seems strange to hear him calling the sentiment “honorable,” but he makes the point that if it is honorable for one side to be patriotic, it is honorable for both sides. Besides, isn’t it more noble to die fighting other patriots than scoundrels or mercenaries? As much as he objects to the “fanaticism” monument, Twain is just as horrified by the monument that honors the Maori fighters who died on the English side—these men were, by definition, traitors to their people and their way of life (*FE* 624). There is no “right” side in a war. The only honorable action is to live, fight, and die for the people or principles one loves, not a patriotism of habit or political convenience. In a republic, Twain argues, the people *are* the country, and it is their duty to decide right and wrong, not the government’s; “they must decide who is a patriot and who isn’t” (*BA* 88).

Each of you, for himself, by himself and on his own responsibility must speak. And it is a solemn and weighty responsibility, and not lightly to be flung aside at the bullying of pulpit, press, government, or the empty catch-phrases of politicians. Each must for himself alone decide what is right and what is wrong, and which course is patriotic and which isn’t. You cannot shirk this and be a man. (88)

The villains with money

The financial state of affairs in nineteenth-century America was turbulent, to say the least. Speculation, regulation, innovation, war, bankruptcies, monopolies, booms, busts, and fraud all contributed to a sense that anything could happen. Capitalism was finding its feet in America, but Americans weren't always so sure where it was taking them. The transition, for millions of Americans, from an agrarian to an urban lifestyle in the late nineteenth century was fraught with struggle. Dire working conditions in factories and mills were the subject of countless stories and reports. Attempts to unionize were met with violent resistance. The rosy promises of industrialism—unlimited growth and widespread prosperity—quickly revealed a dark underbelly. Labor was treated like capital; it was consumed, stretched, and gambled with, often at the cost of lives.

Twain lamented the unrelenting grind of civilization, even as he admired some of its champion capitalists (and would have gladly joined them at the top if he could have made the system work for him). Much as he longed for the rewards to ego and bank account brought by market dominance, Twain could not ignore the cost to human quality of life effected by capitalism. In the "Discourse of Reginald Selkirk," Twain imagines an ancient civilization that strongly resembles nineteenth-century America:

It is a civilization which has destroyed the simplicity and repose of life; replaced its contentment, its poetry, its soft romance-dreams and visions with the money-fever, sordid ideals, vulgar ambitions, and the sleep which does not refresh; it has invented a thousand useless luxuries, and turned them into necessities, it has created a thousand

vicious appetites and satisfies none of them; it has dethroned God and set up a shekel in His place. (*BA* 76)

Twain seems to regard agrarian America with a romantic nostalgia he elsewhere lampoons. Maybe it is a case of sour grapes. Maybe Twain is the aspiring capitalist bemoaning what he cannot achieve; maybe he is the begrudging realist pining for the fading romance of the past. But he might also be a prophet preaching to a fallen nation. Twain sees that his pain economy could be (and is being) replaced by the capitalist economy, and he laments the switch. Twain writes longingly for the morals of a bygone era, perhaps even a former capitalism that was not so ruthless. He finds little but degeneracy in the nation, now. When a Russian revolutionary comes to town, hoping that he will be able to stir up enthusiasm for his cause amongst Americans, Twain feels he must disillusion his optimistic friend.

I told him what I believed to be true—that the McKinleys and the Roosevelts and the multimillionaire disciples of Jay Gould—that man who in his brief life rotted the commercial morals of this nation and left them stinking when he died—have quite completely transformed our people from a nation with pretty high and respectable ideals to just the opposite of that; that our people have no ideals now that are worthy of consideration; that our Christianity which we have always been so proud of—not to say so vain of—is now nothing but a shell, a sham, a hypocrisy; that we have lost our ancient sympathy with oppressed peoples struggling for life and liberty; that when we are not coldly indifferent to such things we sneer at them, and that the sneer is about the only expression the newspapers and the nation deal in with regard to such things; [sympathetic] audiences will be drawn from the ranks of the poor, not those of the rich; . . . they will give, and give freely, but they will give from their poverty and the money result will not be large. (*A1* 462)

It is a bleak kind of State of the Union. Twain perceived a stark opposition between self-serving capitalism and true morality and worried that capitalism was winning.

Although the above passage was written in 1906, the substance of his complaint was nothing new. In 1871, newly married and still dreaming of riches for himself and his family, Mark Twain published “The Revised Catechism,” a satire on the scripted questions and answers recited by religious schoolchildren to demonstrate their understanding of proper doctrine. Twain sets the dialogue in the classroom of “modern Moral Philosophy.” The first question, borrowed directly from the Westminster Catechism,⁴⁷ reads, “What is the chief end of man?” A proper catechumen would reply, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” In Twain’s version, however, the answer is, simply, “To get rich quick” (539). “Who is God, the one only and true?” asks the Revised Catechism. “Money is God,” comes Twain’s cynical answer. “Gold and greenbacks and stock—father, son, and the ghost of the same—three persons in one: these are the true and only God, mighty and supreme; and William Tweed is his prophet” (539). Boss Tweed, of Tammany Hall infamy, is not the only public figure implicated. Twain also lists among the prophets of the wealth gospel notable members of the “Tweed Ring”—A. Oakey Hall (mayor of New York City), Richard “Slippery Dick” Connolly (New York City Comptroller)—as well as other politicians and businessmen, including railroad magnate Jay Gould and his conniving stockbroker partner James Fisk, Jr. “The Revised Catechism” focuses its criticism on corrupt New York politicians, but Twain

⁴⁷ Twain would have learned this version of the catechism as a young Presbyterian.

intends his readers to apply the moral failings of these public figures to the much broader “modern Moral Philosophy.” The relentless pursuit of profit by these moral villains is the new rule for American society. “Do we progress?” asks Twain’s catechist. “You bet your life!” cries the well-rehearsed catechumen (540).

Twain knew the allure of progress. He was an inveterate speculator and a would-be inventor. Any new revolutionary gadget or get-rich-quick scheme had his full attention, at least for a moment. Yet he was wary of the cost of such success. The capitalist prizes progress—here code for the accumulation of wealth by the corrupt few—over reverence, humility, or compassion, and stands ready to bribe, cheat, or harm anyone to get ahead. The only goal: “To get rich . . . Dishonestly if we can; honestly if we must” (“Revised Catechism” 539). Perhaps *because* Twain could not help but long for this unfettered capitalism, he held it in high suspicion. Acknowledging his innate villainy, Twain sees his own desires as guideposts of depravity.

Twain’s weakness for wealth did not keep him from passing judgment on his financial villains. In the pain economy, financial justice within personal relationships is just as important as fairness in national business dealings. The pleasure and the pain can come in any amount. A child might sell out her playmate for a penny with all the same intentions of a railroad tycoon who waters the stocks to make his fortune. The impulse is the same. At their worst, people are fully willing to accept recompense for the suffering of others, and they do it every day.

Twain's publisher at the American Publishing Company, Elisha Bliss, violated Twain's sense of balance and fairness on both a personal and professional level. Hamlin Hill's 1964 book, *Mark Twain and Elisha Bliss*, chronicles the relationship between the two men, largely from Twain's perspective. His characterization of Bliss is that of a man who is business savvy but personally unscrupulous—a damning combination in the pain economy, even if it turns tidy financial profit. Hill gives Bliss credit for being shrewd but not nice: “He was coldly calculating, he was happy to cheat both authors and customers with a repertory of the worst tricks of salesmanship, and he apparently juggled books with the skill of a master accountant” (18). As Hill paints him (and Hill's characterization owes much to Twain's interpretation of their joint history), Bliss was first and foremost a businessman—his concern was with financial profit, not moral standing.

Mark Twain distrusted the financial prosperity of others—especially those in a position to do him wrong. If Bliss profited, Twain wanted to be sure it was not at his own expense. When he was judging Bliss's morality, Twain was interested only in what happened between the two of them. In Twain's mind, his relationship to Bliss—which included not only discussions of his books' profits but the health of their respective families as well—was primary; Bliss's responsibilities as a businessman were to come second. Most of Twain's business communications with Bliss address him “Friend Bliss,” emphasizing this personal connection. So, when his books were not published by the American Publishing Company in the way that he had anticipated, Twain brought his complaints to Bliss with a tone of moral outrage

and personal betrayal. When *Innocents Abroad* was in production, Twain took every delay by Bliss as evidence that the publisher was favoring other books over his. He wrote to Bliss, outraged by a move he felt certain had “damaged my interests”⁴⁸ (“SLC to Elisha Bliss 07/22/69”). More than that, the author’s feelings were hurt:

All I desire is to be informed from time to time what future season of the year the publication is postponed to, & why—so that I can go on informing my friends intelligently—I mean that infatuated baker’s dozen of them who, faithful unto death, still believe that I *am* going to publish a book. . . . These delays are too one-sided. Every one of them has had for its object the furthering of the Am. Pub. Co.’s interest, & to compass this, *my* interests have been entirely disregarded. . . . I think you will do me the justice to say that I have borne these annoying & damaging delays as patiently as any man with bread & butter & reputation at stake could have borne them. I cannot think I have been treated just right. (“SLC to Elisha Bliss 07/22/69”)

Bliss’s failure to promote his book as expected read as a personal affront to Twain.

This letter was written early in their relationship, and Twain’s youth and inexperience with the publishing business may explain why he took Bliss’s actions so personally, but another letter, written exactly seven years later, shows that Twain had not lost his tendency to personalize their interactions through time and experience alone. Apparently, Bliss had heard some rumors that Twain had badmouthed him to others. Twain shrugs off the accusation:

I listen to a director of the company & others, & under irritated impulse, talk & act unwisely, & get sorry at leisure. You tell hard things about me to entertain a group (the worst of it being that they are mainly true, although not pleasant things to remember,) & for a

⁴⁸ He repeats this exact phrase four times in the next few lines to drive the point home.

day I am angry & ready to do or say anything that comes handy. ("SLC to Elisha Bliss 07/22/76")

Twain is schooling Bliss in the ups and downs of his temper—teaching him to expect a certain amount of harmless volatility. "But come," he concludes, "a truce to this—it is good matter to talk about together, but not to write about." For Twain, the tit-for-tat fights of friends are easily smoothed over. Bliss could not injure his relationship with the author repeating embarrassing stories (Twain could repay him for those in a moment); neither should he take offense at Twain's need to blow off steam. The real and irrevocable damage being done was financial. Twain was far less willing to forgive this kind of sin because he could not rebalance the scales. The problem with the American Publishing Company, as Twain saw it, was that they were over-extended, not giving enough attention to the books they were selling (specifically Twain's books, of course) because the stage was too crowded. Like a sparring lover, he uses Bliss's own words to frame his sense of betrayal:

You told me, several times that a subscription house could not run two books at once & do justice to either of them. I saw no reason to disbelieve that, & I never have disbelieved it. Therefore I am solicitous about *Tom Sawyer*—more so than I would be about another book, because this is an experiment. I want it run by itself, if possible, & pushed like everything. Can this be done?—& when? Give me your ideas about it. ("SLC to Elisha Bliss 07/22/76")

The slightest perception that Bliss might give anything less than full attention to *Tom Sawyer* would read to Twain as intentional injury.

Interestingly, when Twain later reflected on his relationship with Bliss, he did not home in on his poor business management—he even comes to argue that the

scale of Bliss's profit off of his loss gave "a sort of dignity" to the swindle (A2 143)—so much as Bliss's personal character. When Bliss first appears in the *Autobiography*, Twain seethes with animosity towards him. Twain introduces the publisher as "a Yankee of the Yankees . . . tall, lean, skinny, yellow, toothless, bald-headed, rat-eyed professional liar and scoundrel" (A1 370). Twain remembers Bliss with unequivocal hatred. Whatever Bliss really was, his disregard for Twain's financial wellbeing makes him a moral villain in Twain's memory, displacing any other feeling he may have had for the man. "He was a most repulsive creature," Twain writes:

When he was after dollars he showed the intense earnestness and eagerness of a circular-saw. In a small, mean, peanut-stand fashion, he was sharp and shrewd. But above that level he was destitute of intelligence; his brain was a loblolly, and he had the gibbering laugh of an idiot. It is my belief that Bliss never did an honest thing in his life, when he had a chance to do a dishonest one. I have had contact with several conspicuously mean men, but they were noble compared to this bastard monkey. (372)

Intent on proving his point, Twain attempts to measure just how much Bliss had wronged him in exact dollar amounts, even though the account is now decades old. After Elisha Bliss died in 1880, Twain was eager to find out exactly how much damage had been done. "Bliss escaped me," Twain sighs in his *Autobiography*, "and got into his grave a month or two before the first statement of account was due on 'A Tramp Abroad'" (372). Twain scrounged up the details on the publisher's shady dealings soon enough. "Bliss is dead," he wrote to his brother Orion in October of 1880. "The aspect of the balance-sheet is enlightening" ("SLC to Orion Clemens 10/24/80"). Looking at the records, Twain estimated his losses at \$60,000—

although Hill puts this number at \$49,000 or less (157). In his notebook in 1882 or 1883, he complains that the American Publishing Company has failed to pay dividends on his books for seven years, and he guesses that an “expert” would discover that they owed him \$2,000, just for *Sketches New & Old* (*Notebooks II* 495-96). “What Twain gave Bliss can be measured in dollars and cents; so much money, a grand new office in 1876, a skyrocketing rise in the value of the company’s stock, and a reputation as ‘the most prosperous subscription-book concern in the country’” (Hill 19). Hill, on Twain’s behalf, rattles off the statistics of his mistreatment—Twain was a shareholder and member of the board who only ever received one dividend, the expansion of the company short-changed his books, etc. Regardless of the exact figure, it is evident that Bliss *did* benefit at Twain’s expense . . . the cardinal sin by the laws of the pain economy.

Twain took some consolation in the fact that, by refusing to give the American Publishing Company Grant’s *Memoirs* he prevented their profiting “a quarter of a million” (Hill 155). But at this point, Bliss was beyond the reach of retribution. “Bliss was dead and I couldn’t settle with him for his ten years of swindlings,” writes Twain (42 52). From the remove of decades, Twain claims that his “bitterness” towards Bliss has faded at last, but even his next words reveal that to be only partially true, if at all. “I feel only compassion for him, and if I could send him a fan I would” (52). Twain will offer his forgiveness, in other words, only if he can be sure that Bliss is roasting in hell.

The simplicity of Twain's accounting is misleading. Twain felt certain that he had figured correctly, but an objective observer will find it difficult to calculate, even in monetary terms, exactly how much Twain may have lost or gained through his relationship with Bliss—or vice versa. Hill credits Bliss with a “tremendous” contribution towards shifting Twain from journalism to book-writing (22-23). Twain might have made a decent profit in journalism, says Hill, but we can't know what might have been. What we do know is that, by Twain's measure, Bliss had violated the fair exchange of benefit and expense in their relationship and, as a result, took the place as an unequivocal villain in Twain's book. He died with his sins still on his head, thus cutting off all opportunity for leveling the field. As a result, his moral character was utterly destroyed, and Twain made sure to leave record of the fact in writing. Perhaps by publicly listing his enemy's sins, Twain hoped to turn the balance back in his favor somewhat.

Given Twain's vehemence regarding the interpersonal financial villainy, one would expect that the great capitalists of the nineteenth century—whose greed frequently took the form of violent oppression of the poor—would be Twain's foremost villains. And, at times, Twain's words for these men *are* harsh, but he faltered in his condemnation of these captains of industry. His criticisms of the robber barons are inconsistent at best—perhaps because he wanted to be one of them. Mark Twain understood the love of money. Many of the faults of Twain's villains are ones that he finds in himself, as well. As a result, Twain's condemnations of his financial villains are delivered with the severity bred by self-loathing and the

slipperiness of self-justification. As Louis J. Budd has pointed out, Twain's was not exactly a champion of the populist cause. He shied away from dealing directly with the problems of the lower class of his own time. Budd stresses that "Twain's sympathy for the underdog never went seriously beyond orthodox limits" (*Social Philosopher* 136). Budd points to the author's early distaste for the concerns of the poor in San Francisco, his criticism of mob rule, and his dream of the wildly efficient Paige typesetter (designed to push laborers out of printshops) as clues to Twain's unsympathetic view of the lower class.

Furthermore, Twain did not see affluence as inherently evil by any means. Money is one of the tools that Twain uses, in the pain economy, to reward his protagonists for their suffering. Twain, says Budd, tells the "popular success story with the climactic boon of a fortune rightly earned. All except his best novels would assuringly end with a big cash awarded to somebody deserving" (*Social Philosopher* 61). This narrative opened the door for even the most notorious of capitalists to be, though not exactly heroes, at least as something less than coldhearted villains. *Maybe* they deserved their wealth, after all.

Even when the extremely wealthy were damned by their millions—newspaper accounts of Vanderbilt's life had a tendency of "unconsciously telling how exquisitely mean a man has to be in order to achieve" his level of prosperity ("Open Letter" 285)—Twain held out hope for their redemption. He sees an alternative, a better way to be rich and powerful. Twain pleads with Vanderbilt to do "something *worthy* of praise" and set an example that will better the world (287).

Of course, Twain doesn't hold out much hope that Vanderbilt *will* become a moral paragon—instead, he predicts the railroad magnate will bargain for his salvation in those final deathbed hours—but the possibility remains that a person *could* attain a righteous and a comfortable life.

Unsurprisingly, Twain let his personal feelings for the people at the center of the issue rule his judgments. Budd notes that, in Twain's circle, there was a constant tension between liberal morality and the earnest pursuit of wealth: "Twain's friends were sincere when they used the catchwords of democracy but they were more strongly committed to a laissez-faire economics" (*Social Philosopher* 68). Twain found it easy to excuse even justify and agree with this kind of thinking. Excusing Henry Huttleston Rogers, however, required a bit more work, but Twain was up to the task. Vice president of Standard Oil and notorious investor, H. H. Rogers "distinguished himself for daring, rapacity, intrigue, and a total lack of business scruples" (Kaplan 322). It was rumored that H. H. really stood for "Hell Hound." Twain was decidedly unconcerned by Rogers' tarnished reputation. "He's a pirate all right," shrugged Twain, "but he owns up to it and enjoys being a pirate. That's the reason I like him" (Shelden 51). During the span of his friendship with Mark Twain, Rogers was embroiled in several scandals—always centering on his questionable business practices, not his personal life. Kaplan draws a comparison between Rogers and Jervis Langdon, Twain's father-in-law, stating that both men were "able to combine rectitude and benevolence in his personal affairs with a certain *laissez-faire* rapacity in business. Neither Langdon nor Rogers felt fettered by the conflict

between private and business morality" (77). Twain seemed to respect this, preferring public transgression and private morality to the reverse.

The friendship between Rogers and Twain was genuine. Rogers could keep up, intellectually, with the author, and he offered Twain something that he sorely lacked: business sense. Rogers guided Twain through what Kaplan calls a "capitalist passion and resurrection" (322)—the financial disaster following Twain's long and gullible investment in the Paige typesetting machine. In his time of need, Twain found Rogers to be a faithful and a trustworthy friend. Twain credited Rogers with suggesting the transfer of all of Mark Twain's copyrights to Livy as repayment for the money she had loaned him from her inheritance, thus putting the copyrights and their proceeds out of reach of Twain's creditors.⁴⁹ Twain would never belittle the service that his friend had done for him, and he strove to repay him in any way he could.

One of the most charming elements of the friendship between Twain and Rogers is how sincerely each believed himself to be in the other's debt. Several biographers and critics tell the story of how Twain, grateful for Roger's help in the midst of his financial distress, refused to publish a book that was critical of Standard Oil, even when he was in dire need of the business and knowing full well that a book on the famous Standard Oil magnate would sell spectacularly. Rogers, for his part, felt indebted to Twain for the pleasure of reading his books, and he spent considerable time and effort helping Twain on this account (Shelden 42). Their

⁴⁹ Although the veracity of this story has been called into question, Twain himself perpetuated it, which is important. It was the story he wanted to be true.

frank appreciation of one another was indisputable, and Twain would do what he could to excuse Rogers for his business transgressions.

Rogers helped Twain's effort in rehabilitating his moral character by providing one important loophole. Very quietly, even secretly at times, Rogers donated large sums of money to charitable causes, including Helen Keller's education, schools for children of black farmworkers, and other similarly noble projects (Shelden 51). Twain's admiration for Helen Keller added weight to Rogers' gesture, and it went a long way towards counterbalancing his unscrupulous business practices. As we have seen in the case of Elisha Bliss, the pain economy is amplified within relationships. Public piety was of far less concern to Twain than personal acts of giving.

John D. Rockefeller, the president of Standard Oil, on the other hand, benefitted from Rogers' business exploits (and contributed plenty of his own) but still tried to build a reputation as a moral paragon. He made sure his faith and his philanthropy were matters of public note. Rogers and Rockefeller did not see eye to eye on personal conduct. Shelden explains how Rockefeller limited Rogers' advancement in the company because of his swearing and gambling. Rogers had no patience for religious qualms in business and was frank about saying so. "We are not in business for our health but are out for the dollars," Rogers stated bluntly during one of his numerous court appearances (qtd. in Shelden 49). But Rockefeller was prone to spiritualize his wealth.

Twain laughed at Rockefeller's struggle to reconcile his wealth with his Christianity. Twain devotes his March 20, 1906, dictations to ridiculing Rockefeller and his son, as they go through the "theological gymnastics" of a rich man in God's house (41 421). Twain doesn't doubt the sincerity of Rockefeller's faith, but he acknowledges the paradox nonetheless. "Satan, twaddling sentimental silliness to a Sunday-school, could be no burlesque upon John D. Rockefeller and his performances in his Cleveland Sunday-school," Twain smirked. "When John D. is employed in that way he strikes the utmost limit of grotesqueness. He can't be burlesqued—he is himself a burlesque" (365). In contrast, Rogers worked to appear more ruthless than he was, sometimes hiding his charitable contributions from the public to keep his tough guy image intact. As a result, he ended up with, as Twain saw it, a reputation that was worse than the one he deserved. It added that much more to his pain account.

Given his close friendship with H. H. Rogers and his family connections to the wealthy Jervis Langdon, it is notable that Twain ventured any criticism at all of the nation's wealthiest class. But in the face of the world's suffering, the imbalance of exorbitant wealth was troubling to Twain, so he loosened his tongue on this subject from time to time. The California Gold Rush, the legend of which tempted a young Sam Clemens westward, became a symbol of corruption for Mark Twain, an end to an era of harmless sentimentality in America (Andrews 238). He would never deny the allure of wealth, but he recognized that any prosperity came with a debt of pain

that must be squared—and he knew that the wealthy, once comfortable, were reluctant to pay up.

The 1904 story, “The \$30,000 Bequest,” is an interesting study of Twain’s ambivalent attitude towards money. In the story, the prospect of wealth both decays personal morality and confuses the pain economy. Saladin and Electra Foster (nicknamed Sally and Aleck) are a reasonably well-off married couple—Sally is a bookkeeper at the town’s “principal store,” and Aleck is an entrepreneurial real estate investor. Their predictable lives are thrown into chaos when one of Sally’s curmudgeonly distant relatives writes that he plans to leave him \$30,000 when he dies (which will likely be soon), “not for love, but because money had given him most of his troubles and exasperations, and he wished to place it where there was good hope that it would continue its malignant work” (599). It is a treacherous gift that promises pain as its dividend. The stipulation of the bequest is that the couple must never inquire as to the health of the relative, nor may they attend the funeral. Forbidden from expressing thanks or telling anyone about their good fortune, Sally and Aleck turn inwards with their good fortune and dream up uses for it. It is not a huge amount, but it is enough to invest and so turn into a fortune.

Thus, the money does its evil work before it ever arrives. The promise of financial gain threatens their joy in what they already had. Aleck becomes obsessed with the imaginary figures of her future investments. Sally schemes ways to spend what his wife will earn. They neglect their duties, becoming distracted, arrogant, surly, and eventually even criminal. Twain explains the downfall as a natural

response to sudden prosperity. “Vast wealth, to the person unaccustomed to it, is a bane; it eats into the flesh and bone of his morals” (616). (Note the qualifier “to the person unaccustomed to it.”) They withdraw from their real lives, working themselves into a frenzy of greed and anxiety over their imaginary speculation. Then, just as suddenly as the promise of prosperity came, they learn that the “wealthy” relative has been dead nearly the whole time, and his “fortune” amounted to an old wheelbarrow that did not even have a wheel anymore. Aleck and Sally break under the news, and they slip away into prattling senility until, after a short period of decline, they die. In the last few lucid moments of his life, Sally reflects on his relative:

Money had brought him misery, and he took his revenge upon us, who had done him no harm. He had his desire: with base and cunning calculation he left us but thirty thousand, knowing we would try to increase it, and ruin our life and break our hearts. Without added expense he could have left us far above desire of increase, far above the temptation to speculate, and a kinder soul would have done it; but in him was no generous spirit, no pity, no— (626)

And thus Sally dies, blaming his relative for his troubles, wishing that the old man had left them *more* imaginary money so that they could have avoided their pain.

This is a tricky story, especially when reading it in the context of the pain economy. The dead relative is obviously no moral hero, since he declares his purpose to be malicious from the beginning. And yet, for his revenge to work, it requires that Sally and Aleck be willing to benefit from his death and the money that, supposedly, brought him so much pain. As a matter of fact, the couple *does* begin to wish for his death with rather heartless impatience. It is difficult to tell whether

money is the cause of moral transgression or a tool for revealing and punishing immorality. On the surface it seems that it is suddenness of their prosperity and their urge to speculate that is the problem, not wealth in and of itself.

This may, in fact, be an important point about all violations of the pain economy. The problem does *not* lie with the particular pain or pleasure. Depending on the circumstances, money may be a curse or a way of honoring virtue. Suffering may be an opportunity for a joke or cause for righteous defense of the weak. Laughter may be a punishment or transformation. It all depends on who is telling the story. In this case, it is the elderly relative who has the power, who controls the scene, who—even in death—is laughing at his own pain and everyone else's. For an author like Twain, power is analogous with narrative control. The question is not what a person does with his or her money or pain but what that person does with the story.

Conclusion

Bergson posits that the funniest physical deformities are those that are imitable, a lapse in good posture or facial expression, normally only momentary, made rigid and permanent (12). Twain presents moral deformities with the same sense of humor—his villains not only feel the urge to be selfish but are downright obstinate in their greed and self-interest. “Disciplinary power,” writes Michel Foucault, “is exercised through its invisibility; at the same time it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility” (199). This is exactly what

Twain does. He sets the moral deformity and, hiding himself in the text, brings the offenders into the light for their punishment. He would not be able to do this if he did not identify, in some way, with the disciplined subjects. Having gone through his own embarrassments and his own punishments for his sins, he is taking his rightful turn as the dispenser of pain. Describing a character who turns from masochist to sadist, Deleuze concludes, "Once they have been undergone, punishments and suffering allow the exercise of the evil they once prohibited" (39). For Twain, the power to punish is part evil and part justice. His heroes would never take up this position as punisher, being too moral, but *he* is sullied enough to engage on this end of the pain economy.

Drawn as he was to the rush of the pleasure and punishment of the pain economy, he could not resist playing both parts. He needed to go with the sinner through the convolutions of power and powerlessness—this is where his genius lay. But as author, Twain raises himself to the position of creator. Twain contains conflict within himself, as both masochist and sadist. He violates the pain economy because he is human, he accepts his punishment as just, he transforms the pain into pleasure, he makes the powerful suffer for their sins, he justifies one man and condemns another—it is a turbulent and productive dissonance. Leland Krauth creates a dichotomy of the transgressive and the bounded Twain, one pushing the boundaries, the other enforcing them. Yet both were contained under the same name. "If the transgressive Mark Twain distanced himself from society by attacking it," posits Krauth, "the bounded Mark Twain both attached himself to and departed

from society by claiming to possess its virtues more fully than society itself does” (256). Twain sabotages his own ideals, either to reflect the “real” world or to correct it. Try as he might, he knows he cannot train humanity out of people. Regarding Hank Morgan’s “Man Factories,” Rowe reflects, “There is little evidence that the boys and teachers ‘trained’ under the new educational regime have learned anything beyond the mere manufacture and operation of the new technologies; they are still profoundly dependent on the ruler, who has simply exchanged his crown or miter for the scientist’s laboratory coat” (186). There is no winning arrangement for society. Capitalist and monarchist, in the end, both reduce to comic incongruities.

“The incongruities of humour,” says Critchley, “both speak out of a massive congruence between joke structure and social structure, and speak against those structures by showing that they have no necessity” (“Did you hear” 47). The inevitable punchline of Hank Morgan’s experiment is that he can do no better than Camelot had already done, and all his work is erased from history (until it will be repeated, with no better success) in the coming centuries. Twain is working towards a kind of nihilism regarding social philosophy. Even as all-powerful author, Twain must sometimes surrender to the failure of his own morality and the world’s to produce the just result.

The only thing left to us is to laugh. “The best humor gets us to see familiar things in unfamiliar ways,” says Morreall, “and so does the best philosophy” (“New Theory” 257). Imitating the “real” world, with its broken morality and its powerful

villains, Twain repeats the familiar until it becomes absurd, and we ask ourselves, “Who is to blame for this?”

In some ways, God is Twain’s only villain. Twain’s villains, copied from life experience, are imitations of God’s creation and moral invention. In Twain’s mind, however, imitation is *not* a form of flattery. The imitation of the “real” world is, instead, quite damning, both of creatures and creator. Twain’s audience will always find this kind of unflattering reflection on the world in his stories. The “final failure of society” exposed in *Pudd’nhead Wilson* is only half hidden behind the fictional “veils” of justice and heroic triumph (Cox 228). Some of the best readings of the uncomfortable conclusion to *Huckleberry Finn* see the unfair treatment of Jim—repaying his suffering and humiliation with gaudy praise and hollow promises—as a satire of Southern attitudes about the dignity of free black people in the Reconstruction period (Quirk, *MTHN* 159-60). Twain is *not* reinventing society; he is reflecting it. When defined by society, moral ground is unstable. Myra Jehlen argues that *Huckleberry Finn* is so focused on contradiction and dissonance that the text comes to actually embody them, both in theme and form—like the society it describes, the book disintegrates around moral questions (96-97). It becomes an object of imitation, and an uncomfortable one at that. Who made the world this way? Who made people who would behave so cruelly? Who can we blame?

Of Shakespeare, Twain wrote, “He correctly observed, and he marvelously painted. He exactly portrayed people whom *God* created, but he created none himself” (WM 736). It is both an exoneration of Shakespeare—since he did not

create the awful human beings he depicted—and an admission of unoriginality. Twain is willing to surrender the power of invention if God is willing to take the blame for the broken moral system that rules the world. In “Letters from the Earth,” Satan charges the distorted Christian God with the greatest of all sins: “God is all-knowing, and all-powerful” (*BA* 239). Twain, of course, sees it as an admission that God is a conscious force behind all events, aware of suffering and fully able to prevent it. “That is definite enough, isn’t it?” Satan asks in follow-up. “It makes the Creator distinctly responsible for everything that happens, doesn’t it?” (239).

Taking his cues from the Author of Life, Twain does the same. As I will explore in the next chapter, God is the very model for Twain’s role as author. Twain’s equation with God is not only self-aggrandizement; it also works to bring God down to a size where he can be approached, mimicked, criticized, and supplanted. In Fulton’s words, Twain “uses the grotesque . . . to bring Providence down from the empyrean to the human world of dust” (63).

CHAPTER FIVE: The Authors

Mark Twain saw his advantage and jumped on it. If God is the ultimate power in the universe, then he is also the primary sadist, the author of all pain. Twain's engagement with God was mental, spiritual, and literary—all at the same time. Twain's struggles with religion were complicated by his surroundings. One of his closest friends, Joseph Twichell, was a Christian minister. Both the Clemens and the Langdon families were religious. Twain was bound to religious discourses by birth and nature—even if as a “countertheologian” (Brodwin 235). Furthermore, as Alfred Kazin points out, there exists between God and man an interdependence, a mutual interest—even obsession (3). For a masochistic thinker like Twain, this kind of bondage to a deity who hurt him was more freeing than impeding. God's active participation in the scene invited Twain's creative powers to transform the pain he suffered; God's claims to authorship gave Twain the confidence to criticize his work, to revise it, and even to challenge it with a new reality.

Twain makes it clear that the old explanations will no longer hold water. He is bringing his editor's pen to the world as it has been explained. “We are accustomed to seeing the hand of Providence in everything,” Twain scolds (*A1* 236). Looking at the thing objectively, a God who allows those within his care to suffer for long stretches before finally putting an end to it—or, more accurately, allowing

someone else to end the suffering of his charges—is worthy of scorn, not praise and adoration. Twain sums up the problem thus:

When Providence washes one of his worms into the sea in a tempest, then starves him and freezes him on a plank for thirty-four days, and finally wrecks him again on an uninhabited island, where he lives on shrimps and grasshoppers and other shell-fish for three months, and is at last rescued by some old whisky-soaked profane and blasphemous infidel of a tramp captain, and carried home gratis to his friends, the worm forgets that it was Providence that washed him overboard, and only remembers that Providence rescued him. (A1 236-37)

If we are to believe that God controls every circumstance, then he is as much responsible for the shipwreck as he is for the rescue. These are the rules of the pain economy. The pain economy defines Twain's favored reality.

For Twain, the benefits of belief in God did not outweigh the pain caused by religion. Rather than being protected by one's faith, the believer must too often work to protect his faith from the natural assaults of logic. If a man finds his "Truth," the Old Man declares, he simply stops looking, then "spen[ds] the rest of his life hunting up shingles wherewith to protect his Truth from the weather"⁵⁰ (WM 760). It is a comic image, one which cautions against repeating this man's mistake. Still, he knew that there were others who might disagree. "[T]here are all sorts of people, & they require all sorts of comforting," Twain wrote to his Catholic friend, Charles

⁵⁰ The Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna warns against the same kind of narrow-mindedness regarding even the most fundamental of Buddhist principles, the emptiness of all things. Nagarjuna writes:

The Conqueror said that emptiness
Eradicates all dogmatic views;
As for those who take a dogmatic view of emptiness
He said that they are incurable. (qtd. in Yoo 78)

Stoddard; “consequently there are those who require this sort—I mean this sort of comfort that is found in what is called religion” (Clemens and Gross 261).

That said, he wasn’t quite willing to ascribe the comfort of religion to God so much as to the human ability to profit from pain. Twain found this especially true of the Trappist monks, whose practices of deprivation, which they perform without resentment or complaint, were created in diametric opposition to their desires. “La Trappe must have known that there were men who would enjoy this kind of misery, but how did he find it out?” asks Twain (*FE* 844). Twain feigns incredulity that anyone—certainly not “you and me”—could benefit from so much pain, but he admits that Trappe is on to something: “he knew the human race better than it knew itself” (844). The monks are denied all kinds of pleasure—“personal distinction,” “delicious food,” soft beds, staying up late, sleeping in late, easy work, female companionship, billiards, betting, pets, smoking, etc. (844-45). These deprivations aside, God *could* offer a reward to these monks that Twain could not, though that exchange seems less than fair to Twain. “From what I could learn, all that a man gets for this is merely the saving of his soul” (845). But salvation is not the only thing drawing these men to their sacrifice. The ability to capitalize on pain is human, not divine. “[Trappe] knew the powerful attraction of unattractiveness; he knew that no life could be imagined, howsoever comfortless and forbidding, but somebody would want to try it” (845). Religion might use different terms, but the successful sects are those that play by the rules of the pain economy. For Twain, the value of religion, if

there is any, lies in its ability to reward a person for the suffering he or she has endured.

Yet in the middle of the religious satisfaction with pain stands its God, so greedy for praise and honor and so liberal with his cruelty. He cannot be ignored. Obediently, Twain searches for more information about this one, great sadist. He turns to the first place he encountered this deity: the Bible. In “Letters from the Earth,” Satan describes the Bible as a hodge-podge of poetry, fables, war stories—mostly plagiarized—and lies. Its inventions and morals are not good; the book itself is unoriginal. “What shall we do?” asks Satan. “If we believe, with these people, that their God invented these cruel things [heaven and hell], we slander him; if we believe that these people invented them themselves, we slander *them*” (BA 227). Satan does not contest the fact that the world is full of suffering; he only complains that the explanation of its authorship—as laid out in the Bible—is problematic. Either the people who believe and invented this story of God as Author are stupid, or their God is sadistic. Satan leaves the question open, but he later declares of the people, “They are better than their Bible” (252). Twain makes his choice. He will accept a sadistic author-God, if only because that is the kind of God that he can wrestle with. Here is a God with weaknesses.

One alternative picture of God, which Twain sometimes entertained, presents a deity so immense that he could not possibly be conscious of humanity’s little troubles. This version of God gave Twain the satisfaction of mocking humankind for its inflated sense of self-worth, which he was happy to do. Even his own investment

in pain became ridiculous—as if our puny pains and pleasures amounted to anything in God’s notice, as if he were capable of intending or not intending harm to us. “How insignificant we are,” Twain wrote to Livy,

with our pigmy little world!—an atom glinting with uncounted myriads of other atom worlds in a broad shaft of light streaming from God’s countenance—& yet prating complacently of our speck as the Great World, & regarding the other specks as pretty trifles made to steer our schooners by & inspire the reveries of “puppy” lovers. . . . Does one apple in a vast orchard think as much of itself as we do? or one leaf in the forest—or one grain of sand upon the sea shore? Do the pismires argue upon vexed questions of pismire theology—& do they climb a molehill & look abroad over the grand universe of an acre of ground & say “Great is God, who created all things for Us?” (LL 133)

Human pain becomes an amusing story, told this way—little people crying their complaints to an ear too large to comprehend their words—but it leads nowhere. How can such a God be held to account? The pains of apples and ants carry no value.

The more fruitful scenario for Twain was one in which God was scaled almost to human size. The God-as-author character allows Twain to roll God into the pain-pleasure exchange. He becomes an active participant in our scenes of sin, punishment, pain, and pleasure. Twain needed a reliable top to partner with his masochistic bottom. Only thus could he reenact and parody the power-imbalance that he believed to be at work in the world. It would be imprudent for Twain to dispense with God altogether. The pain economy cannot be practiced in isolation.

In the following example, Twain brings God from cosmic creator to rival author. Significantly, he does so through a series of competing narratives. Twain introduces Chapter XII of *Following the Equator* with a dream of the immense God:

I dreamed that the visible universe is the physical person of God; that the vast worlds that we see twinkling millions of miles apart in the fields of space are the blood corpuscles in His veins; and that we and the other creatures are the microbes that charge with multitudinous life the corpuscles. (497)

Twain tells his dream to a missionary, who muses that Hinduism must be founded on dreams that they have taken for truth. The missionary's voice now controls the narrative of the chapter as he tells of his troubles inspiring Christian faith in his Hindu neighbors. But one of the missionary's characters, an old Indian man, subsequently takes over the narration from the missionary. The old man explains that all people "recognize a god by the work of his hands" (498)—he himself favors the Hindu gods because they produce better and more alluring miracles than the Christian one. The old man consoles the missionary by pointing out that Christianity is a newer religion than Hinduism; the Christian gods are currently inferior to Hindu ones, but eventually they will multiply and grow in power and will produce better stories. Three times within the chapter, a voice from within the story rises up to take it over—first Twain (who started out the chapter as a blood corpuscle), then the missionary, then the old man. Each attempts to bring the known and unknown world under their narrative control. The Author's throne is vulnerable.

Author-God

Twain first approaches God through the natural world. This is God's most immediately legible text. "Letters from the Earth" early introduces the "LAW OF NATURE" as synonymous with the "LAW OF GOD" (BA 219). There is no

manifestation of God that does not claim responsibility for creating the world.

Twain is insistent that the cruel inventions of nature incriminate the author-God. In *Following the Equator*, Twain describes a fungus that roots into a cocooned caterpillar and kills it. Theoretically, the caterpillar feels no pain, but Twain doubts this is true. Surely an insensible caterpillar would have been rejected for one that could suffer (*FE* 602). The most basic law of Nature (and therefore the law of God) is sadism. Pain and violence are so deeply intrinsic in God's natural law that nature does not work without them. Before the Fall, Eve notes that the large cats have teeth designed for flesh-eating and that, without death, the buzzards are suffering (*BA* 10). Soon enough, however, suffering takes its rightful place in the natural order.

In "The Refuge of the Derelicts," Rev. Lo-what-God-hath-Wrought delivers a lecture ironically titled "The Benevolence of Nature." To demonstrate the "kindness" of nature and her concern for even the smallest creature, Rev. Lo-what-God-hath-Wrought uses the example of a spider. A film accompanies the lecture, illustrating the spider's story and offering an alternative narrative to the reverend's sermon. The spider is a faithful wife, waiting for her husband's return, the reverend preaches. She is also a faithful believer, trusting Nature (read: God) to bring her nourishment. On the screen, the spider's hunger outweighs her loneliness, and she greedily eats her husband upon his return. When her hatchlings emerge from the egg sack, Rev. Lo-what-God hath-Wrought reports that she "gathered them to her maternal breast in a rapture of gratitude and joy" (246). On screen, the infant spiders half-devour their mother. Soon, a parasitic wasp swoops down, plunging her ovipositor into the

poor spider, laying eggs in her and taking the spider back to her burrow to be eaten alive by the wasp's larva. Twain drives home his point through the reverend's religious sugarcoating of the scene: "With a deep hymn of gratitude to kind and ever-watchful Nature, who allows none of her children to suffer, the larva gnawed a hole in the spider's abdomen, and began to suck her juices while she moaned and wept—" (247). As Katsumi Satouchi has pointed out, almost the exact same example is given in "Little Bessie":

[T]he wasps catch spiders and cram them down into their nests in the ground—*alive*, mamma!—and there they live and suffer days and days and days, and the hungry little wasps chewing their legs and gnawing into their bellies all the time, to make them good and religious and praise God for His infinite mercies" ("Little Bessie" 866).

There is one consolation, of course. Reverend Lo-what-God-hath-Wrought placidly recites the moral of his tale:

Soon the spider will have the reward of its patience, its faith, its loving trust. In six days the half of it will have been eaten up, then it will die, and pass forever to that sweet peace, that painless repose which is provided for all, howsoever humble and undeserving, who keep a contented spirit and cheerfully do the duties allotted to them in their sphere. ("Refuge" 248)

Pain and loss are intractable elements of the manuscript of God's world. The only reward is a doubtful promise of eternal rest . . . *if* we do not refuse our allotment of pain on earth. The pain economy, of course, urges quick and fair restitution while life endures. A promise of eternal glory made by a deity prone to exaggeration is insufficient reward for a lifetime of suffering in Twain's book.

This promise is delivered by God's other, more literal text: the Bible. Twain finds that this text, too, reveals God's flawed character. "It is most difficult to understand the disposition of the Bible God," Satan complains in "Letters from the Earth," "it is such a confusion of contradictions; of watery instabilities and iron firmnesses; of goody-goody abstract morals made out of words, and concreted hell-born ones made out of acts; of fleeting kindnesses repented of in permanent malignities" (BA 237). By his own admission, God is a jealous god. He loves the "Sunday compliments" paid him by humans, and he is not willing to give them up: "He valued them. To him they were riches" (237). His jealousy drives him to inflict all manner of pain in order to reap the pleasure of worship.

In "Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven," Twain reads the Bible with sarcastic literalism. Trying to justify God's seeming indifference to human suffering, the angel Sandy patiently explains to Stormfield,

You've often noticed, in history, where the awful oppression of a nation has been going on eight or nine hundred years before Providence interferes, and everybody surprised at the delay. Providence *does* interfere, and mighty prompt, too, as you recongnize when you come to allow for the difference betwixt heavenly time and real time. (BA 186)

He references, here, the religious trope that "a thousand years are as a single day to God." Prayers for rain reach God who "reflects a minute" and gives the okay—a year later. "If people would only take the Bible at its word," Sandy sighs, they might plan for this discrepancy in time (186). "Providence has *got* to have a minute to reflect," he says. "Otherwise there'd be mistakes, on accounts of too much hurry" (187). It is

absurd, from the human perspective, that a year's delay in a rain shower might *not* be a "mistake," but these inconveniences are not of sufficient concern to God to warrant a change in procedure.

Preachers and Sunday-school teachers amend the Biblical text with their own teachings and interpretations, and Twain lumps all these works together in his critique. He draws an editor's line through all impossible promises. Because it is so totally lost to fantasy, God's text spells misfortune and suffering for its subjects when reckoned with the realities of human nature. Twain underlines the danger of such careless disconnect with his "good little boy." Jacob Blivens, a diligent student of religious texts, starts all of his moral speeches with an exclamation like "Oh, Sir!" "in dead opposition to the fact that no boy, good or bad, ever starts a remark with 'Oh, Sir!'" ("Good Little Boy" 377-78). He misjudges people's motivations and their probable reactions to his intrusion in their lives. His head is lost in the fantasy text of the Bible and the Sunday-school literature, and so he totally misreads the world around him . . . to his detriment. Twain sends his main character, Jacob, to lecture bad boy Jim about stealing apples. Jim falls from the apple tree directly onto Jacob and breaks the good boy's arm. Jim is unhurt, of course. The religious authorities promise that sin will be repaid with punishment, both earthly and eternal, but anyone can see that this grand pronouncement falls far short of execution. In Twain's estimation, God's text is dangerously out of touch. Following God's script to the letter, Jacob Blivens is eventually blown to high heaven due to a misunderstanding between himself and an adult who has no patience for his moral

lectures. Twain puts the blame squarely on the shoulders of the Author of Jacob's fantasy: "Thus perished the good little boy who did the best he could, but didn't come out according to the books" (378). It is dangerous to take God at his word.

The Bible and other religious narratives do not satisfactorily explain why living must be so dreadfully painful. Twain argued that the daily insults and injuries of human life were as much the work of God's hands as the blessings and could be used against him accordingly. God's claim of being "all-powerful and all-knowing"—a basic principle in Christian belief—reads to Twain as an admission of responsibility for all kinds of suffering, both petty and grand. "That is definite enough, isn't it?" writes Twain. "It makes the Creator distinctly responsible for everything that happens, doesn't it?" (*BA* 239). Every minor mishap, every major misfortune, is God pulling the levers on our lives. In the Garden of Eden, Eve calls herself "just an experiment, and nothing more" (*BA* 20). For a while, that "experiment" seems harmless enough, but the temptation and the Fall prove that it was an experiment in pain and suffering from the beginning. And the experiment, it seems, has not yet been concluded. Every day, the scientist-creator-author-God bends over his experiment with giddy, sadistic interest.

Providence,⁵¹ Twain had learned in Sunday-school, was the guiding force of human life, implementing the script written by God with precision and power. John

⁵¹ In the traditional religious sense, the term "Providence" is not exactly interchangeable with "God," but neither is it independent from God. Providence is, very simply, the manifest power of God to control the outcomes of human life.

Calvin insists the minutest events in human existence are all the work of Providence, though the uninformed may think it is luck alone:

If one falls among robbers, or ravenous beasts; if a sudden gust of wind at sea causes shipwreck; if one is struck down by the fall of a house or a tree; if another, when wandering through desert paths, meets with deliverance; or, after being tossed by the waves, arrives in port, and makes some wondrous hair-breadth escape from death—all these occurrences, prosperous as well as adverse, carnal sense will attribute to fortune. (I.16.2)

This is erroneous, Calvin says. Providence is active, aware, intentional at every moment, whether the outcomes seem pleasant or painful. “When one considers the many instances of ‘special providences’ in the scriptures,” Joe B. Fulton writes, “it becomes clear that quite frequently human pain results” (54). Fulton sees Twain wrestling in his Western tales with a Providence who causes suffering as readily as it bestows blessing. The idea of a guiding hand is more ominous than comforting. Twain’s view is that “there truly are no accidents, but it does not assert the beauty of the result” (Fulton 60).

The idea of Providence, God, and Author as one was ingrained in Twain’s mind. In his discussions of providence, Calvin freely refers to God by the title “Author” (I.16.1). As Twain takes on the authorial role, his style will necessarily resemble that of the divine, and his imitation is in its own way a critique. Any fault with Twain’s execution of his authorial power he can claim is merely a reproduction of the model, scaled down to a more decent size. Fulton discusses the role of “the providential writer” who, like the more cosmic Author, plans every detail of the narrative (63). With Twain at the helm, characters are hardly safe from all earthly

harm. They are bound to his vision of the world and suffer the consequences. If Edward Mills truly had control over his own life, he probably wouldn't have given gone into business with his drunken, lazy cousin, George Benton ("Edward Mills and George Benton: A Tale"). He wouldn't have given up his girlfriend or his inheritance to him. He may not have chosen to surrender his life rather than give up the combination to a bank vault. But the author Twain decided it would be so, and it is not in a character's power to resist. Similarly, the deck is stacked against Kalula and his lover in "The Esquimau Maiden's Romance"; their author is committed to the telling of their grotesque self-destruction from the beginning. Twain could have saved Kalula or even touched his "Esquimau" characters with a modicum of dignity, but this did not meet his literary purpose. Twain's characters suffer their misfortunes and indignities with the same helplessness that Twain complains of at God's hands. Fulton stops short of claiming that Twain sought equivalence with God, but he notes that Twain works to bring a "regeneration of our understanding of literary providence" (64). Whatever discomfort we have with Twain's treatment of his characters turns back, in part, to his model—Providence.

Not all of Twain's contemporaries found the idea of Providence so dismal. God's name, then as now, was invoked as the defender of one's particular cause, the judge of an enemy's sins, the champion of the victorious, and the friend of the downtrodden. In the religious narrative of the Civil War, writes Kazin, both the North and the South felt that they were "*living* Scripture" (127). Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic," proudly published on the front page of *The Atlantic*

Monthly in February 1862, clearly demonstrates the propensity of partisans to cast themselves as protagonists in God's narrative. Built on the tune of "John Brown's Body," the song is an unequivocal assertion of divine support for the Union army. John Brown's soul—separated from his body in support of the Northern cause⁵²—marched steadily on until it became replaced in the lyrics with "God's truth," "God's day," and even God himself. It is a sincere expression of faith that God's story was designed around Northern victory.

Across the battle lines, of course, Confederate soldiers were just as earnestly singing "God Save the South":

God made the right stronger than might,
Millions would trample us down in their pride.
Lay Thou their legions low, roll back the ruthless foe,
Let the proud spoiler know God's on our side.
Let the proud spoiler know God's on our side. (Miles 11-15)

It is impossible that God could be the champion of both sides—or, if he is, then the logic of his actions defy explanation. For Twain, this second theory was the most believable.

⁵² Captured in 1859 after a raid on an armory at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, militant abolitionist John Brown was tried and hung for crimes of treason, murder, and inciting a slave insurrection. The Harpers Ferry raid contributed significantly to the growing tensions between North and South that would eventually lead to war. The song "John Brown's Body" was originally a Union marching song before Howe wrote new lyrics for it. The refrain "John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave. / His soul is marching on!"—later changed to "God's truth is marching on"—cements this Northern hero's role as a protagonist in God's story.

Twain took the word of God's representatives (his ministers) that this world is God's plan in action. If true, it forced God into the difficult place of needing to reconcile his "merciful" reputation with the terrible suffering that he apparently orchestrates single-handedly. The conflict is useful to Twain. "Could reality come into direct contact with sense and consciousness," writes Henri Bergson, "could we enter into immediate communion with things and with ourselves, probably art would be useless, or rather we should all be artists, for then our soul would continually vibrate in perfect accord with nature" (74). Twain's art is better suited to exploring the workings of pain than a harmonious vibration with nature, and he chooses his God accordingly.

Twain's God is an Author. Twain suggests that the primary reason God forbade eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was that he was threatened by the idea that Adam and Eve would "be as gods" (*BA* 238). Of course, Adam and Eve *did* eat of the tree, and Twain sees that we are all now "as gods"—jealous, vengeful, and petty . . . and endowed with the power to tell our own stories. Twain became like God every time he took up his pen. He saw the author-God as a competitor—and a poor one, at that.

Author Twain

In Susy Clemens' biography of her father, the young writer reports that her father "doesn't like to go to church at all, why I never understood, until just now, he told us the other day that he couldn't bear to hear any one talk but himself, but that

he could listen to himself talk for hours without getting tired” (A1 346). It is a funny image—Twain as preacher, congregation, and choir, all shouting hosannahs at his self-contained truth. But as Susy rightly guesses, the joke was “founded on truth” (346). Twain felt himself to be God’s rival.

Twain laid out his rivalry in specific terms. If we deduce God’s unobservable powers from those we observe in practice, Twain reasoned, then we may fairly judge God by his creation: Man, who is made in his image. Since Man is a mixture of good and bad (though usually more good than bad, Twain concedes), then we may assume that God is likewise, having supplied Man with goodness in order to admire his own “principal feature” (LL 253).

At this point, then, I draw another inference: that he is as good & as just as Man is . . . And if that is so, I arrive at this result. I am plenty safe enough in *his* hands; I am not in any danger from that kind of a Deity. The one that *I* want to keep out of the reach of, is the caricature of him which one finds in the Bible. We (that one & I) could never respect each other, never get along together. I have met his superior a hundred times—in fact I amount to that myself. (253-54)

It is a direct challenge to the Biblical author-God, the one that claims complete control of the universe and all human events. Twain’s seeming generosity in inferring a better God than the Biblical one—the God of the text—is something of a ruse. Ultimately, Twain has only a slight, speculative interest in the grand, moral deity. That God is not much of a rival or a scapegoat. The only God that Twain really cares about is the one that he can wrestle with. He needs a God that is not a hero but a villain, one whose sadism Twain knows and fights in himself. “I love you,” Twain once wrote to his sister, Pamela,

& I am sorry for every time I have ever hurt you; but God Almighty knows I should keep on hurting you just the same, if I were around; for I am built so, being made merely in the image of God, but not otherwise resembling him enough to be mistaken by anybody but a very near-sighted person. (*LL* 254)

If Twain is going to have to answer for his sins, he is taking God down with him.

But Twain could never stand on completely equal footing with his nemesis.

Despite his power to create like God, to mimic God's work and critique his texts, Twain remained human. He was subject to the laws of nature, the mechanisms of his character, and the whims of fate. God's abuses in the pain economy were not merely stylistic; they were personal. Twain complained to Livy of the struggle of the round-the-world lecture tour to repay the debts incurred through his investment in James Paige's failed typesetter. "How we fought the idea," he remembers, "the horrible idea, the heart-torturing idea. . . . To pay debts that were not even of my making" (Clemens 179). He chafed at the demands of "honor" and the desire for "ethical glory" that compelled them. Instead of being paid back for their dedication to these moral ideals, Susy was taken from them. "You want me to believe it is a judicious, a charitable God that runs this world. Why, I could run it better myself," Twain said to his wife (179). Although Livy tried to convince him that moral behavior was its own reward, Twain clung to a strict economy, even with God. "I want payment in some coin for everything I do. If I can't get peace and joy in return for propping up my blatherskite of a crumbling soul, then—I'll let her rot and the quicker the better" (180). Livy attempted a few more tacks against her husband's blustering sense of injustice, but she could not win. He conceded a few points: death was kind to Susy,

and he himself deserved to suffer. But Livy couldn't convince him that God had dealt fairly with her, his wife. "Punishing you on the rack for living the life of a ministering angel, a faultless mother," Twain said. "I hate Him for that" (180). God's failure was irreparable, for he had dared to distress one of Twain's most cherished heroes. Worst of all, there was no recourse. Twain could not reciprocate.

But playing victim to a sadistic author-God is a deceptively powerful position. Twain takes control of the narrative, using his pain as criticism of God's injustice. Twain's complaints about the oppression wrought by God mask the author's play for power. "What insolence and humor, what inexpressible defiance and ultimate triumph lie hidden behind an ego that claims to be so weak," writes Gilles Deleuze (124). There can be no oppressed ego if the scene partner does not play the punishing superego. In a tangled web of dominant and subjected wills, Twain flexes his power and ego by painting God as the ultimate oppressor of mankind. By retelling the story from the point of view of a victim, Twain challenges the validity of his rival's narrative.

Because they are narrating the same scene, Twain must use pieces of God's story and play, like a good masochist, by God's rules. In "Reflections on the Sabbath" (1866), Twain tenders his criticisms of God's authorship with some obligatory fawning, placing "such worms as we" in contrast to the "all-powerful Providence." His suggestions for improving human life seem, at first, wholly demure, but his author's nature will not be suppressed:

... as I said before, it ill becomes us to hunt up flaws in matters which are so far out of our jurisdictions. I hold that no man can meddle with

the exclusive affairs of Providence and offer suggestions for their improvement, without making himself in a manner conspicuous. Let us take things as we find them—though, I am free to confess it, it goes against the grain to do it, sometimes. (208)

He can hardly help himself. The text is ripe for revision.

Interestingly, the more empowered Twain becomes as a critic of God's sadistic authorship, the more he resembles him. When he advances to the role of author-sadist, Twain *does* become "in a manner conspicuous." Just as Twain holds God to account for his judgments, so we scrutinize Twain's authorial choices: when Boggs lies dead in the street and Colonel Sherburn strolls away unscathed, when Tom Driscoll is sold down the river for behaving exactly as he was trained to, when the iron door closes over Injun Joe. Within his text, Twain's characters are subject to his inconsistencies, his errors. And Twain was full of these. The long-standing discomfort that readers feel with the evasion chapters at the end of *Huckleberry Finn* provides a fine example of just how "conspicuous" the author becomes in his seat of power.

Louis J. Budd argues that the end of the book, even from the missed turn at Cairo, treats Jim unfairly. "Though Twain planted sound excuse [for the missed turn], the basic truth is he misrouted Jim's flight to freedom so he could work in many key episodes that are incidental to the escape plot" (*Social Philosopher* 102-03). Twain does to Jim what Tom will do later: he manipulates him as a device in Huck's story, spending Jim's pain and his agony freely. As James Cox argues, the reader who objects to Tom's torture of Jim for adventure's sake—he calls this "pure cruelty"—must contend with the fact that the book itself performs the objectionable act of

setting free an already free slave (175). It is the reader's vision, not Twain's or Huck's, that forces morality on Huck's "go to hell" moment; Huck's journey is an escape, not a quest (Cox 172). Even Jim's enslavement and eventual freedom are not primarily his. According to Myra Jehlen, Jim and Huck are both bound at the Phelps plantation—Jim by chains, Huck by civilization—"reaffirm[ing] the morality of an individual commitment to freedom in the face of society's entrapments and to transcendent truths against the world's inevitable duplicities" (Jehlen 103). But Twain is working for Huck's freedom, not Jim's, says Jehlen. Rather than honestly dealing with the injustice of slavery, Twain frees Jim and thus "further frees Huck" from any guilt about the escape or his reenslavement (113). The sudden erasure of Jim's struggle—Tom Sawyer naively declares him "free as any cretur that walks this earth" (*HF* 356)—trivializes his journey, makes it a joke. Twain has the power to do otherwise. It is his story.

Like the author-God, the author Twain controls his stories with reckless unconcern for the wellbeing of his characters, but he does so without any claims to moral superiority. "More than once I have been humiliated by my resemblance to God the Father," Twain wrote to his daughter, Clara (qtd. in Lystra 259). Twain never claimed to be moral hero; on the contrary, Twain believed himself worthy of punishment for his crimes. He plays sadist—nonchalant about the needless pain he causes—while calling down judgment on his own head. The humorist is often "a divided personality," writes Freud, comparing the functions of joking to "neurotic illness" (137). That self-division troubles both sides of the dichotomy—the serious,

punishing, moralistic sadist and the humorous, pain-transforming, disobedient masochist. Evan Carton describes Twain's self-sabotage on stage, disrupting his own reading of poetic and moralistic passages with humorous bursts and self-mockery and preventing the audience from getting comfortable in his "serious" writing (162). It is imperative for Twain that all things be reciprocal, that his "serious" work stirs laughter and his "humor" teaches a lesson. Justin Kaplan paints a picture of Twain, late in life, addicted to celebrity and stifling his moral and political opinions in an effort to remain popular. "Sometimes he was not at all sure that it had been worth while to give up the freedom of the humorist in order to become a sage" (Kaplan 366). Of course, he did not always have to give up one for the other.

Twain was capable of embodying contradiction. He does not vacillate between control and submission, guilt and redemption, moral balance and imbalance—all play simultaneously within his work. As T. J. Lustig puts it, "There is no pendulum swing" (88). He could be the author and the critic, the sadist and the masochist, without a sense of self-betrayal. Twain contained conflicting identities and philosophies as a matter of course.

Twain bridges the divide (or divides himself so as to occupy both sides) between tragedian and comedian. Bergson writes that the tragedian, or dramatist, pulls from his own soul when he writes, whereas the comedian generalizes about others' souls (82). Twain did both. Twain's ability to play both the masochist and the sadist was the key to his creative power. He will only play the punisher if he can punish himself along with the rest of us. "Twain's successful humor depends on his

sense of superiority,” writes Leland Krauth (106). But it is a superiority inextricable from his sense of inferiority. He draws his readers into the pain economy charged with his own suffering. The embarrassing, self-deprecating, painful stories Twain tells about himself are accepted without reservation by his fans, but his writings carry a Trojan message, both humorous and sage.

“[T]he ultimate comical effect occurs when, after removing the mask, we confront exactly the same face as that of the mask,” writes Slavoj Žižek (56). “While in a tragedy the individual actor represents the universal character he plays, in a comedy he immediately *is* this character” (88). This is the same kind of act being performed in masochism. The power imbalance is not being represented; it is being enacted. The top actually *has* power over the bottom and truly causes the bottom pain. Becoming sadist and masochist, the players not only act out the parts of oppressor and victim—they are those people. Twain does take the comedic/masochistic path, becoming the thing he represents, but he also serves as the universal representative. He keeps a foot in both comedy and tragedy, seeking some kind of balance.

Cox defines Twain’s literary “failures” by the limitations both of his comic character and his over-serious sense of self (159-60). If Twain’s failures occur between these points, however, so do his successes. The mask of Author God is removed to reveal the face of Author Twain, or perhaps it is the other way around. Twain’s self—subjected in God’s text or elevated in his own—is the central content of his writing. If he had not allowed himself to be exploited or betrayed, if he had not

become both suffering subject and punishing author, there would not have been much writing at all.

Revision and Critique

Forrest Robinson contends that Twain used fiction like therapy; it was an escape from the guilt-ridden world he lived in (“Innocent” 456). Twain’s writing was not so much an escape, however, as it was an enactment of the cycles of guilt, punishment, and transformation of pain that he saw in the world. His writing drew him into his feelings of guilt and his pain and forced him to deal with them in concrete terms. The original source material for Twain’s guilt and pain was often God’s text. He resented the suffering written into his life by religious belief, Providence, or natural law, but he returned to it deliberately and strove to transform it through the pain economy. “Leave me to my delusions,” Twain’s character pleads with his Christian Science ‘doctor’ as she tries to discount hunger, thirst, and pain as mere material fantasies (*Christian Science* 6). Calling his pains “delusions,” Twain reveals that he both disbelieves and dislikes them—but he chooses them nonetheless. Twain knows that his suffering is inevitable in either God’s text *or* the revisions of the pain economy, but he is committed to the author’s role.

To better examine how Twain revises God’s text rather than dispenses with it, let us turn to “The Facts Concern the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut.” In the story, the narrator dispenses with conscience, which is the primary vector for

emotional pain and opponent to pleasure. The exchange, at first, seems morally balanced in the narrator's favor, since the dwarf-conscience enjoys the narrator's convulsions of shame "with joy and contempt, and placidly chuckling" (648). And yet, the sins that the conscience brings up are, by any measure, shameful—raging at children for no good reason, cowardly abandonment of friends in need of defense, a cruel practical joke played on a trusting brother ages ago (648). Does Twain really mean that these faults should pass without an appropriate measure of guilt, without some means of setting matters right? No, in fact. Twain's problem is not with the concept of the conscience; it is in the application. "The *purpose* of it is to improve the man," the dwarf-conscience admits, "but *we* are merely disinterested agents. We are appointed by authority, and have n't anything to say in the matter. We obey orders and leave the consequences where they belong" (652-53). Where those consequences "belong" is with the creator of this imbalanced mechanism, conscience.

The suffering narrator complains of the discomforts of conscience, and the powerful author begins to experiment with an alternative—this time an unsuccessful one. The total loss of the conscience is not progress. Unable to feel moral pain, the narrator is distant, blissed out, almost drugged. But his behavior is violently painful to other people. Twain shows his readers that conscience has its place. He knew from personal experience that it had the power to change human behavior. He knew its painful jabs had potential to rebalance the accounts of one, like him, too often careless of other people's pain. The conscience was a good idea

poorly executed. One cannot revise a text that is a complete failure. There should be a system of sin and punishment, moral honor and reward. But the current model needs work.

Considering the self-proclaimed “fairness” of God,⁵³ Twain muses, “The rain is famous for falling on the just and unjust alike, but if I had the management of such affairs I would rain softly and sweetly on the just, but if I caught a sample of the unjust outdoors I would drown him” (Clemens 276). It is a simple ideal, strictly adhering to the rules of the pain economy. Twain wants the world to function this way. When he is the author, he can make it so. In “Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog” (1865), for instance, Smiley—who has been wagering on the misfortune of others—ultimately suffers his due embarrassment. In “Is He Living or Is He Dead?” (1893), Twain revives and rewards the artist, dead before he could enjoy the fame and fortune bought by his paintings: “For once they didn’t starve a genius to death and then put into other pockets the rewards he should have had himself” (117). When helping Helen Keller with fundraising for support of the blind community in New York, Twain even fantasizes about bringing his moral order into the real world. Correcting the existing imbalance in the world, this fundraising project, says Twain,

will do for the adult blind what Congress and the several legislatures do so faithfully and with such enthusiasm for our lawless railway corporations, our rotten beef trusts, our vast robber dens of insurance

⁵³ Twain models this passage on Matthew 5:43-48, part of Jesus’ famous “Sermon on the Mount”: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. . . Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

magnates; in a word, for each and all of our multimillionaires and their industries—protect them, take watchful care of them, preserve them from harm like a Providence, and secure their prosperity, and increase it. (A1 464)

Twain borrows the basic idea—Providence—from his rival, but he promises to employ it with a better, truer morality.

“The Curious Republic of Gondour” (1875) is one of Twain’s most dramatic revisions. He creates an impossible fantasy of flawless balance. In this piece, Twain establishes a meritocracy based on “property, character, and intellect”; the well educated receive more and “immortal” votes to serve as a “wholesome check” on the voices of the ignorant (634-35). This results in a complicated hierarchy, in which people are ranked by the quality of their contribution to the nation, not the contents of their bank accounts. Still, the American fable of rag-to-riches persists: “It was common to hear people admiringly mention men who had begun life on the lower levels and in time achieved great voting power” (636). Triumph over adversity, no matter what the currency, remained important to Twain. Although Twain later gained a more nuanced view of the ways that class discrimination impact a person’s ability to gain education and property, Gondour depicts what Twain believed (at the time) a perfectly balanced society would look like.

Oddly enough, Twain doesn’t really consider the possibility of corruption in this new republic. Without explaining how this miracle happens, he simply declares politicians in Gondour to be smart, able to administer business concerns, well paid (to prevent graft), and moral beyond party lines (637). Citizens in this republic might very well assert, with Eve, “I feel like an experiment. I feel exactly like an

experiment" (*BA* 20). Gondour couldn't really work within the parameters of human nature as Twain really knew it to be. Gondour is the epitome of fairness—do good and you will be rewarded, do harm and you will be harmed—but it is flat writing and blindly unrealistic. The pain economy, it turns out, is a better tool for measuring morality than for creating it.

Stanley Brodwin refers to Twain's revisions as "countertheology," a means by which he could "transmogrify his relentless regrets" into something both comic and artistic (233). Counter-anything, of course, necessitates a preexisting something. Take, for instance, the "gospel" of "What Is Man?" that serves as a revision of both sacred text and the orthodox understanding of human nature. "He believed that it was theological dynamite," says Kaplan, "that all creeds which gave dignity to man and God would crumble under the force of its angry logic" (340). If Twain succeeds in tearing down a belief in human dignity and traditional morality, however, he destroys the power of "What Is Man?" as well. The "joke" of the Old Man's philosophy lies in the fact that he delivers his message of human malleability and amorality by in the language of rational argument and moral reasoning. The revision is most effective if the original text is still active in the reader's consciousness. Twain appropriates the emotional power of deep-rooted beliefs in human autonomy and virtue.

In *Following the Equator*, Twain does a similar thing, facetiously appropriating the name of “Satan”⁵⁴ for his Indian servant. The joke depends on strong feelings that people might harbor about the safety and appropriateness of consorting with one of that name. One day, Satan delivers a message to Twain at home: “God want to see you” (653). Twain is flustered, but he asks God to come in. It is a momentous gathering of great figures—God, Satan, and Twain in one room! Twain soon clarifies that it was not *the* God, but a man-god, a local divinity. It is still impressive, and the effect of having Satan presenting God at Twain’s door adds a mythic quality to Twain himself. Without this borrowed authority, Twain’s would have to be built from the ground up.

Tom Quirk locates Twain’s “genius” in his ability to combine individual and universal human traits—the peculiarities of human nature meant to amuse, the generalities to accuse (*MTHN* 39). His imitation of human nature accuses not only the people portrayed but the author-God responsible for its many foibles. When Twain’s depiction of human nature is a literal rewriting of God’s text, he can shift blame for its pain onto the original source. Like Shakespeare, who “exactly portrayed people whom *God* had created, but he created none himself” (WM 736), Author Twain’s imitations are accusations, too. His reality is bound by that authored first by God.

Twain’s most poignant critique is manifest when he plays the sadistic author in pure imitation of God—his own flaws masked by God’s. With God as a scapegoat,

⁵⁴ He will, of course, repeat this trick in the *Mysterious Stranger* manuscripts for a more directly religious rewriting of the character.

Twain becomes ruthless with his pain distribution. Twain's tales and novels are littered with undeserved suffering: massacre, persecution, mishap, etc. Sometimes, Twain will enter with humor in hand to restore the balance; but usually the readers, not the characters themselves, benefit from the humorous touch. Their pain, having lived through similar humiliations and injuries, is repaid through humor, but what of the characters within the text whose pain is exercised for the readers' benefit? They are the casualties of the critique.

Ego and Fiction

Twain's position as author/creator and reviser of God's creation seems to be hugely egotistical. Who is he, after all, to disparage all humankind? As Žižek writes, "The negative force that undermines [universal features of dignity] is that of the individual, of the hero with his attitude of disrespect towards all elevated universal values, and this negativity itself is the only true remaining universal force" (55). Twain as critic and author looms large, his perception of human life becoming the controlling viewpoint, his words creating and destroying realities.

Humor, too, can appear quite egocentric. "Humour has the same formal structure as depression," writes Simon Critchley, "but it is an anti-depressant that works by the ego finding itself ridiculous" (*On Humour* 101). Although it seems paradoxical to embolden the ego by mocking oneself, any kind of self-absorption is ultimately satisfying to the ego. As Critchley writes, "Our wretchedness is our greatness" (111). Twain practices this kind of wretched self-celebration, especially

in his travel books. Mark Twain may be telling stories on himself—his vain attempt to impress a shop-girl in Gibraltar with his knowledge of kid gloves (*Innocents* 73-75), his foolish purchase of a “Genuine Mexican Plug” (*Roughing It* 178-84), his lazy “walking” tour of Europe in *A Tramp Abroad*—but he takes center stage in order to tell these stories. This Mark Twain character is witty, careless of social restrictions, a unique specimen. Mark Twain, the great authorial self, dominates his texts—he is no transparent narrator. Furthermore, Bruce Michelson suggests that Twain’s use of wit, sudden and surprising, elevates the individual and disrupts the collective sense (518-19). Twain’s humor celebrates the quirky, indecorous individual—Huck Finn, Scotty Briggs, Col. Sellers, etc.—rather than the conformist. With his snappers and wry maxims, he enjoys turning conventional wisdom on its head and inserting his revised text as the new standard.

But even as he practices the ego-inflating role of Author and Creator, Twain attacks the idea of a unique and powerful ego in his texts. As usual, any pleasure will be charged for in equal measure. “What Is Man?” reveals the desire-driven ego, but the Old Man turns around and challenges the substantiality of the “self” implied by such an ego. All the thoughts and opinions that we consider to have arisen from our selves, after all, are but “odds and ends of thoughts, impressions, feelings, gathered unconsciously from a thousand books, a thousand conversations, and from streams of thought and feeling which have flowed down into your heart and brain out of the hearts and brains of ten centuries of ancestors” (WM 734). This causal philosophy echoes the Buddhist idea that “all things and all events, including all elements of

one's individual experience, come into being merely as a result of the aggregation of causes and conditions. . . . all things are by nature interdependent, originating entirely as a result of other things and other factors" (Gyatso 30). The teachings of Buddhism assert that we must not only let go of our attachment to things but to the idea that anything has an intrinsic reality: "Emptiness, or the absence of inherent existence, is the final reality, and empty nature, the final mode of all beings, is the characteristic which all phenomena share" (Yoo 78). Non-reality extends even to the sense of self, the ego. "Enlightenment is the realization that there is no ego to destroy" (Yoo 136). Twain, too, finds that the individual self is reduced beyond "the smallest microscopic fragment," without originality, creative power, or control (WM 734). In "The Character of Man," Twain lays out the lies of human existence— independent thought, tolerance, freedom, Moral Sense—adding, finally,

yet one other branch-lie, to-wit, that I am I, and you are you; that we are units, individuals, and have natures of our own, instead of being the tail-end of a tape-worm eternity of ancestors extending in linked procession back—and back—and back—to our source in the monkeys, with this so-called individuality of ours a decayed and rancid mush of inherited instincts and teachings derived, atom by atom, stench by stench, from the entire line of that sorry column, and not so much new and original matter in it as you could balance on a needle point and examine under a microscope. (855)

The science of human evolution combined with the logic of human spiritual insignificance was convincing evidence that the self was a fiction as much as any other. Man is left "a cipher, a vacancy, a nobody, a nothing" ("Czar's" 642). Perhaps most significantly, even the grand Mark Twain turns out to be a creation, a fiction with a borrowed name who tells lies for a living. The author may be colossal, but

only within his own text can he be so. Beyond that, he is—like all of us—derivative, indistinct, and powerless.

For John Morreall, this is the entire point of humor:

[N]ot only can humor be used to *produce* enlightenment, then, but the experience of enlightenment, with its sudden realization of the illusory nature of the self, can itself be a profound kind of amusement. The biggest joke I shall ever experience is me. And once I am liberated from attachment to my ego and can see myself with a sense of humor, the humor in all of experience comes easily. ("New Theory" 262)

It is a joke that Twain enjoys. Twain's humor returns us, time and again, to a point of humiliation, obsolescence, and release. The humiliation of self-debasement is amusing, freeing. It is a joke that he plays on himself easily and habitually. At the very end of *Following the Equator*, Twain begins to allow his ego a bit of inflation for his accomplishments on the lecture tour: "It seemed a fine and large thing to have accomplished—the circumnavigation of this great globe in that little time, and I was privately proud of it. For a moment" (882). His pride is checked by the news of a new star, the light from which had traveled the equivalent distance of Twain's yearlong journey in under two minutes. "Human pride is not worth while; there is always something lying in wait to take the wind out of it," concludes Twain (882). These are the last words of the book, returning the mighty author to his rightful place.

Twain, character and author, remains bound to the reality of his text. As Buddhist philosopher Dosung Yoo puts it, "In terms of reality, creator and creation exist simultaneously. Creator and creation cannot be separate. Without creation, we

cannot think of a creator. Creator and creation are two sides of the same coin (reality)" (76). Twain's philosophy probes the nature of suffering and affliction, but not so as to overcome them. Twain did not seek "nirvana"—"the state beyond sorrows" (Gyasto 38). To achieve nirvana is to excuse oneself from the cycles of suffering, death, and rebirth; and Twain, though he recognizes the illusory nature of reality, chooses to remain within the illusion.

Writing is an act of creation as powerful as that in Genesis. There is no reality that is not also some author's fiction. Twain's dream manuscripts—among them, "Which Was the Dream?" and "Which Was It?"—show reality and fiction as interchangeable. In several of the dream stories, the dreamer is either in the process of writing or about to begin writing when he falls asleep and enters an alternate reality. "Which Was It?" opens with a statement from the wife of George Louisiana Purchase Harrison, our protagonist, in which she declares of her husband, "I think he is literary in his make, indeed I feel sure of it" (179). That is enough information to tell the reader that George will have trouble distinguishing between reality and his own fictions and dreams. In "3,000 Years Among the Microbes," the "translator" remarks of the manuscript, "Although this work is a History, I believe it to be true. There is internal evidence in every page of it that its Author was conscientiously trying to state bare facts, unembellished by fancy" (433). The piece is a fantasy, obviously. The ostensible author is, after all, a microbe. But Twain calls it a work of "bare facts, unembellished by fancy." Are "facts" any more or less factual when their veracity only exists within the text? Note, too, that Twain assumes that we

understand that a history is generally *not* factual: “*Although* this work is a History . . .” (my italics). He implies that “bare facts” are always fantasies and hints that all claims to reality are contestable.

“I have not professionally dealt in truth,” Twain wrote in his notebook. “Many when they come to die have spent all the truth that was in them, and enter the next world as paupers. I have saved up enough to make an astonishment there” (*MT’s Notebook* 371). The search for truth is an illusion, the Old Man tells his protégé in “What Is Man?” “There have been innumerable Temporary Seekers after Truth—have you ever heard of a Permanent one? In the very nature of man such a person is impossible” (761). We don’t require *actual* truth. We will settle for whatever makes us feel good. When it comes to humor, Freud says, this sort of emotional bias leaves us unable to differentiate between the validity of a joke’s assertions and its ability to make us laugh.

For it turns out—and this is the surprising thing—that we ascribe our enjoyment of a joke to the combined impression made by the content and the success of the joke together, and we allow ourselves to be pretty well deceived by the one factor over the extent of the other.
(87-88)

In other words, if we think the joke is funny, we assume its assertions are true. Conversely, if we agree with the idea, we rate the joke more highly than it might deserve. If the joke pleases us, for whatever reason, we reward its author with our good faith. Twain exploits this tendency in his readers. He guides us down booby-trapped paths of false certainty all the way to the intersection of “reality” and

“fiction.” Yet we have laughed with him. We *want* him to be a dealer in truth because we believe him. It is important to us to sort out the truth from the lies.

Not so for Twain. When Twain says the word “fact,” we may assume there is a trapdoor underneath. “It isn’t a doctrine,” the Old Man declares of his teachings about human nature, “it is a fact” (737). As Jennifer Gurley points out, the Old Man’s certainty about human nature is the very kind of “petrified” thinking that he is certain is invalid. If he does not think he can seek truth indefinitely, he could, Gurley suggests, “*accept* that the truth which makes him comfortable is *merely* temporary and not a permanent ‘gospel’ to be insisted on others” (257). But Twain is proving a point by laying down seemingly inflexible, “factual” doctrine that is undercut by its own arguments. The Old Man is writing his own reality. We can see, logically, that it is self-defeating, but from within his text—his fiction, as it were—the Old Man speaks from the very pinnacle of truth. His doctrine is full of holes, but the Old Man will never see that. None of us will doubt our doctrines until we exit the fictions in which they are contained.

Twain was not worried, therefore, about violating the rules of God’s text, even when he borrowed its authority for his own. It was just another fiction, vulnerable to decay and self-contradiction when removed from the author’s control. Twain’s writing, says Robinson, is engaged and “entangled” with “the fabricated web of reality”—he recognizes that the socially constructed reality is a fiction, and that lying is essential to the storyteller (“Innocent” 29). To heal the injuries done in God’s world, Twain needed to step outside of the original text and write his own. “It is an

odious world, a horrible world—it is Hell,” he wrote; “the true one, not the lying invention of the superstitions; and we have come to it from elsewhere to expiate our sins” (LL 328). All reality was just another fiction to Twain, a dream:

I dreamed I was born, & grew up, & was a pilot on the Mississippi, & a miner & a journalist in Nevada, & a pilgrim in the Quaker City, & had a wife & children & went to live in a Villa out of Florence—and this dream goes on and *on* & sometimes seems *so* real that I almost believe it *is* real. I wonder if it is? But there is no way to tell, for if one applied tests, *they* would be part of the dream, too, & so would simply aid the deceit. I wish I knew whether it is a dream or real. (qtd. in Quirk, *MTHN* 232)

Such a distinction, in the end, is only a matter of semantics. Twain’s revisions and mimicries were as “real” as God’s version by their own measure.

The fundamental measure that Twain used to evaluate his reality was, of course, laid out in the pain economy. Twain’s dream narratives question whether the “realness” of an experience has anything to do with its morality or its emotional importance (several of the characters commit crimes, mistreat their loved ones, suffer excruciating loss, etc. in their dreams—the effect of which threatens to extend beyond the reaches of the dream). We can’t know, from within the dream, whether this reality is *the* reality, so whatever pains we suffer, whatever crimes we commit within the dream must be real *enough*.

“You perceive, *now*, that these things are all impossible, except in a dream. You perceive that they are pure and puerile insanities, the silly creations of an imagination that is not conscious of its freaks—in a word, that they are a dream, and you the maker of it” (*Mysterious Stranger* 405). The enigmatic 44 (eponym of *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*) leaves the protagonist, August, in total isolation, the author

of his own reality: “Nothing exists but You. And You are but a *Thought*—a vagrant Thought, a useless Thought, a homeless Thought, wandering forlorn among the empty eternities” (405). It is Twain’s famous final declaration of solipsistic, even nihilistic, worldview—or so the story goes.

The dream ending of *No. 44* serves many critics as proof positive of Twain’s ultimate bitterness. It is evidence of Twain’s “violent nihilism that seeks to blow the world to smithereens because it hurts so” (Keough 58-59). Kaplan calls Twain’s final position “a shrill, philosophically shallow nihilism which enabled him to dismiss responsibility and to obliterate all distinctions between the real world and the dream world, or, using other favorite co-ordinates, between truth and lies” (347). August’s final words in the book seem to lend a finality to the discussion: “I knew, and realized, that all he had said was true” (*Mysterious Stranger* 405). It is the ultimate disruption of morality, certainty, and reality. But rather than declare all the known world a fantasy and slip away into a vast, dreamy nihilism, Twain engages the dream. It is the masochist’s approach—enact the scene of suffering, take control over the pain, become the dreamer of the dream. But to do this, one must *enter* the scene. Whatever solipsism there is, it exists outside of the dream. That is *not* where Twain directs us when 44 charges, “Dream other dreams, and better!” (404).

The scene is established: the author has created a complete, self-contained reality which invites the participation of the reader. The purveyor of comedy, says Critchley, has to commit himself or herself to a distorted reality without any semblance of doubt; it is the audience who will compare the joke to the facts and

make a judgment about the veracity of the joke-world (*On Humour* 88). For Fulton, August is the prophet who, finding life to be “a vision, a dream,” must interpret it (188-89). But August interprets nothing for us; he simply accepts that what 44 says is true and leaves it there. We the readers must step in and defend our position in the dream . . . or deny the dream entirely. Twain asks us to decide: are we in total isolation, meaningless and solitary, or are we part of the greater machinery of life and reality?

Within the Dream

So what? Twain asks his reader. So what if this “self” you believe in is an illusion? So what if reality is a fiction, a dream? You are living in that dream—how will you conduct yourself? Twain challenges us to consider the possibility that we are all fictional, figments of some perverse imagination, human or divine. But he also pushes us into the dream. The pain economy is concerned not with the vast, empty space outside of the fiction but what happens within it, to its readers, its author, and its characters. When we exist in the dream, its rules are the only ones we have. Reality may not be real, but it is, as I have said before, *real enough*.

From within the dream, the dream reality is all that matters. The pain economy functions with perfect indifference to the “reality” of the pain. If it is

experienced as pain, it is pain. “Which Was the Dream?” recycles⁵⁵ a story in which a girl complains that she is always being bitten by a bear in her dreams, but she never gets to be the one doing the biting. It is unjust. “[W]hile you are *in* the dream it *isn’t* a dream—it is reality,” Twain explains, “and the bear-bite hurts; hurts in a perfectly real way” (233). There is no objective position outside of the dream, determining what is fiction and what fact. Truth and reality are products of the moment.

In our dreams—I know it!—we do make the journeys we seem to make; we do see the things we seem to see; the people, the horses, the cats, the dogs, the birds, the whales, are real, not chimeras; they are living spirits, not shadows; and they are immortal and indestructible. (“My Platonic Sweetheart” 294)

Twain was committed to the illusion while he was in it, as he was writing it. As Helen Keller said of her friend, although he wrote fiction and exaggerated the past for a living, “[I]n the core of him there was no make-believe” (56).

Twain’s writings are a place where a person’s dream—Tom Sawyer’s, for instance, at the end of *Huckleberry Finn*—might just up and shoot him (341). But the illusions of the dream are as vital as they are deadly. “Don’t part with your illusions,” advises Twain. “When they are gone you may still exist but you have ceased to live” (*FE* 792). We enter Twain’s pain economy like a player enters the masochistic scene: with the understanding that the pain and power about to be enacted are real. As Lyn Cowan explains, the scene—the fiction, the fantasy—becomes the location of our very existence:

⁵⁵ Twain lifts the story almost word for word from notes recorded during his daughters’ childhood—Susy was the original protagonist of this story.

We may have to apply the whip occasionally to get on with it, but once the binding power of the fantasy takes effect, there is no going back. The fantasy cannot be stopped, and it goes on creating reality. Masochism, before it is anything else, is essential reality. It is not a mere perversion, not a distortion or deviation, but essence: a reflection of the soul in its tortured, most inarticulate moments. These are moments of exquisite pain, imminent death, intolerable images, of unbearable passion that ignites both body and soul. (xi)

Deleuze, too, observes the power of masochistic fantasy to create reality, though he wrongly names it a means of escape. Masoch, says Deleuze, does not negate the world but creates a dream world into which he might escape, a place where belief in the accepted facts is suspended and challenged (32-33). The dream becomes the ruling state—both humor and masochism recreate the originating reality in performance. It is a means of living in the “real” world, not an escape from it. Staci Newmahr makes this very clear in her description of the masochistic performance: “Unlike contrived performances, the objective of SM play is the achievement of emotional, psychological, and physiological experience of the *actor as authentic*” (71). When participating in this scene, there is no representation. It is reality.

Critchley finds this self-contained reality of humor to be paradoxically reassuring. “The consolations of humour come from acknowledging that this is the only world and, imperfect as it is and we are, it is only here that we can make a difference” (*On Humour* 17). Humor and dreams occupy the same place in our psyche, says Sigmund Freud, but they serve different social functions. Freud argues that the dream depends on being internal and inscrutable for its existence. “It can only exist in disguise,” he writes (172-73). “The joke on the other hand is the most

social of all the psyche's functions that aim to obtain pleasure" (173). Whereas the dream is designed to be unreadable, the joke must do its work in the open. Bergson agrees, arguing that dreams and comedy share the same "logic"—distorting the world according to illusions and delusions (91). Twain, a writer of both dreams and humor, would not divide them so neatly. Twain's dreams, when written, became eminently social works, directed towards an external audience. Meanwhile, Twain's humor is sometimes as inscrutable as any of Freud's dreams; humor, after all, is a place where "meanings jostle one another" (Bergson 59).

If the dream is true while it goes on, then our responsibility to act morally within the dream itself persists. So what are the rules and morals of dreamland? This is left up to the author of it. "[The comic spirit] dreams, I admit," writes Bergson, "but it conjures up in its dreams, visions that are at once accepted and understood by the whole of a social group" (1-2). Twain rejected the social rules that made no sense to him—patriotism, party loyalty, piety, etc.—but held staunchly to those that did. He may not have entirely thrown off the rules of traditional morality—the fairness and balance of the pain economy, after all, are by no means revolutionary ideas—but he employed these familiar rules in the extreme, thus circumscribing the boundaries of his particular reality. In his writing, he prepares for Susy's prayer, in which she earnestly hopes that "there may be a God and a heaven—or something better" (41 326), to be answered. Twain did not necessarily claim to have achieved that "something better," but his fiction, his dreams, and his humor demonstrate an attempt to survive the pain, control it, and use it to make sense of the world.

Full participation in the “dream” of human existence means suffering. There is no other way. It always has been so, and it always will be. Twain was resigned to this fact, both in his own life and in the greater world. Clara observes of her father, “Even when surrounded by comforts and luxuries he never sank into their clutches. He did not become ‘comfortable’ to the detriment of his intellect and soul” (4). But whether he chose it or not, comfort was not in the cards for Twain—at least, not as he told the story. It is the law of his own text. Through Susy’s eyes, Twain gives a description of the world in which suffering is its most salient feature:

A myriad of men are born; they labor and sweat and struggle for bread; they squabble and scold and fight; they scramble for little mean advantages over each other; age creeps upon them; infirmities follow; shames and humiliations bring down their prides and their vanities; those they love are taken from them, and the joy of life is turned to aching grief. The burden of pain, care, misery, grows heavier year by year; at length ambition is dead; pride is dead; vanity is dead; longing for release is in their place. (A1 325)

The cycle repeats endlessly, generation after generation. Twain’s Mad Philosopher, Reginald Selkirk, calls it the “Law of Periodical Repetition”: “nothing whatever can happen in a single time only: everything happens again, and yet again, and still again—monotonously” (BA 77). Pondering this painful pattern, young Susy laments, “Mamma, what is it all for?” Almost in direct answer, Twain leaps to the story of her wishing “that there may be a God and a heaven—or something better” (326).

For Twain, participation in the world governed by the pain economy, whether or not it turns out to be a dream, was mandatory. The urge to seek

enjoyment in spite of, even by means of pain—the Old Man’s law of self-satisfaction—may be distasteful, but it is the root of all human action, good or bad:

It is our breath, our heart, our blood. It is our only spur, our ship, our goad, our only impelling power; we have no other. Without it we should be mere inert images, corpses; no one would do anything, there would be no progress, the world would stand still. We ought to stand reverently uncovered when the name of that stupendous power is uttered. (WM 751)

It may be illogical, but dreams and fictions do not need to be logical; they make their own rules. The pain-pleasure exchange was intrinsic in Twain’s world, and there was no way to avoid it.

Twain did not seek to avoid it. A dreamless sleep would be unbearable—a stagnant fate worse than pain. Twain was instinctively wary of inactivity. Twice, at least, Twain paints a picture of his idea of hell—once in “The Private History of a Campaign that Failed” and once in *Huckleberry Finn*. The young militiamen in “Private History” find themselves at Mason’s farm, welcomed back to comfort after a night of misery hiding from an imaginary troop of Union soldiers.

We staid several days at Mason’s; and after all these years the memory of the dullness, the stillness and lifelessness of that slumberous farm-house still oppresses my spirit as with a sense of the presence of death and mourning. There was nothing to do, nothing to think about; there was no interest in life. (875)

The same farmhouse haunts Huck at the Phelps plantation:

I got there it was all still and Sunday-like, and hot and sunshiny—the hands was gone to the fields; and there was them kind of faint dronings of bugs and flies in the air that makes it seem so lonesome and like everybody’s dead and gone; and if a breeze fans along and quivers the leaves, it makes you feel mournful, because you feel like

it's spirits whispering—spirits that's been dead every so many years—and you always think they're talking about *you*. As a general thing, it makes a body wish *he* was dead, too, and done with it all. (HF 276)

It is a stark contrast to the constant motion and adventure of the river. Twain does not want to disengage from the world, even with all of its pains. Both Huck and the Twainian narrator of “Private History” will be startled from their inactivity by dramatic events culminating in someone being mistakenly shot. The pain and the guilt of their participation will propel them on their way, providing the energy necessary to “light out for the Territory,” returning them to active participation in their given realities. The pain economy will pay its dividends.

Michael Shelden writes that “what sets [Twain] apart from so many other writers with a talent for staring into the abyss is his ability to face the worst and still find a reason to laugh” (xxxi-ii). For Twain, the laughter is tied to the abyss—they are part of each other. Rather than surrendering to the oppression of life, Twain becomes a participant and invites us to enter the scene as well. But because we know we are in a scripted scene, we are afforded the opportunity to stand as observers of our own pain. Critchley quotes Trevor Griffiths who asserts that a “true joke . . . has to *liberate* the will and the desire, it has to *change the situation*” (“Did you hear” 47). Critchley argues that humor “suddenly and explosively lets us see the familiar defamiliarised, the ordinary made extraordinary and the real rendered surreal, and we laugh in a physiological squeal of transient delight, of pleasurable pain” (47). Our whole perception of reality shifts, even if that reality itself does not change.

Twain draws our attention to reality as a text to be scrutinized. “His humor arises from the act of exploiting the discrepancy between the futile illusion—not merely his own, but those of society and history—and ‘reality,’” says Cox (12). His role as a humorist, Cox continues, is not to produce material but to “discover *nothing*” (13). Even as he promotes fairness within the fiction of our shared reality, Twain reveals it to *be* a fiction. Moreover, it is funny. But Twain does not discard this ridiculous fiction. Twain’s humor draws us into the scene. Critchley uses terms like “redemptive” and “messianic” to talk about the work of humor (*On Humour* 16). In Twain’s hands, “the familiar”—pain, power imbalance, and the like—is transformed into usable currency. The pain economy invites our investment, and once invested, we cannot easily withdraw.

Beyond the Dream

In a letter to Charles Warren Stoddard, referenced at the beginning of this chapter, Twain explained to his friend, a devout Catholic, how it was that he maintained peace despite his unbelief. After allowing that religion might be a comfort to some, Twain asserts, “Peace of mind is a most valuable thing” (Clemens and Gross 261). Considering how many people have had their lives disrupted by the teachings of the Bible, Twain argues, it owes peace to at least some of them. He goes on:

But you must not make the mistake of supposing that absolute peace of mind is obtainable only through some form [of] religious belief: no, on the contrary I have found that as perfect a peace is to be found in absolute unbelief. . . . Both of us are certain now; & in certainty there is

rest. Let us be content. May your belief & my unbelief never more be shaken in this life! (261)

Twain paints his unbelief as the mirror image of Stoddard's belief. Both have found a settled truth. As we know, of course, certainty was always a temporary possession for Twain. There was too much profit in the pain to rest long in peace.

Twain's spiritual state is sometimes called "agnostic," sometimes "atheistic." I am not sure that either of these terms fully encapsulates Twain's relationship with the faith he was actively rejecting by claiming unbelief. "If there ever was a Calvinist whose theology survived his faith, it was Mark Twain," remarks Kazin (191). The religious God remained an important figure for Mark Twain, a rival author whom he judged by his flawed creations. Constantly revising the moral system proposed by the Christian religion, Twain remained bound to the original. Although Twain found a way to position himself as a powerful author in his own texts, he maintained a dual identity, still subject to God's world and God's injustice. Brodwin notes that the determinism in Twain's writing (which seems to offer an escape from guilt) contrasts with his compulsive return to guilt in a kind of flesh vs. spirit struggle (232). Twain seeks redemption, says Brodwin, only after having banished the Redeemer. But perhaps Twain could be both guilt-ridden and guilt-free—the competing stories of life washing back and forth in a creative chaos.

An oft-quoted epigram from *Following the Equator* reads: "There are those who scoff at the schoolboy, calling him frivolous and shallow. Yet it was the schoolboy who said 'Faith is believing what you know ain't so'" (497). It is a nicely ambiguous statement, which is probably why it is so popular. On the one hand, the

joke lies in the implication that the mystery of faith, stated so succinctly by the “frivolous” schoolboy is as frivolous as he. On the other hand, belief in a lie, a fiction—what you know ain’t so—is the essence of human existence. It may be frivolous, but it is the only way we know how to believe anything. Whether we believe in the fiction of the Christian God, another deity, or the recreated reality of some other author, we believe, says Twain, in a dream. The author is drawn to the fictions because they are useful to him; they are the source of his energy and his identity. The “reality” of a lonely thought in the vacuum of space is hardly as fruitful a place to dwell. “Why blame God for becoming man’s ‘supreme fiction’?” asks Kazin (193). Because it makes a good story, for one thing. Because the imbalance of pain and pleasure implied in that fiction opens up the exchange that will fund a lifetime of writing. “To the last,” Quirk notes, “Twain continued to scold a God he did not believe in and to populate a Heaven that did not exist” (HNB 35). It was his basic work as an author to do so. For the author, belief and unbelief become manners of engaging with the story, not states of the soul.

The difference between humor and religion, says Critchley, is that humor seeks redemption in *this* world, problematic as it is, while religion places redemption in ‘the world to come,’ where problems don’t exist (*On Humour* 17). At some point, however, the author must lay down his fiction. The dream must end. Twain looked to death as the savior that religion had failed to produce. Although he wrote critically of those who brought wrongful death on others, he nevertheless honored death as a gift. When his loved ones died, Twain expressed gratitude for

their lot; nevertheless, he sought out any reason that he might be the cause of their death or of their unremunerated pain before death. Death might excuse one person from the exchanges of the pain economy, but those left behind had to deal with repercussions of their great injury in the normal fashion.

Late in their marriage, Twain wrote to Livy in an effort to convince her that he believed in “the immortality of the soul” (LL 344). Dixon Wector, who edited the *Love Letters* collection, argues that Twain’s claim to belief is a lie, that Twain had no faith in the soul’s immortality but was saying these things merely for Livy’s sake. But Twain had a knack for believing the stories he told, even if it was just for a moment. And so Twain took up the fiction of the afterlife and edited that, too, to his satisfaction:

I don’t *know* anything about the hereafter, but I am not afraid of it. The further I get away from the superstitions in which I was born & mis-trained, the more the idea of a hereafter commends itself to me & the more I am persuaded I shall find things comfortable when I get there. (LL 254)

Twain was open to a new story, even if he did not—deep down—believe in it. He could believe in it long enough. It was his way of extending his love with Livy. “At the very least the one who loves beyond the grave has the right to free the love in him from its human limits and not hesitate to give as much meaning to it as anything else that seems conceivable to him,” writes Georges Bataille (170). It moves a person, Bataille says, beyond the “vulgarity that comes with daily relationships.” It seems to have worked for Twain. Even after his own passing, Clara wrote of her father, “So great a personality can never fade into the state of death” (1). Within the

stories he created, those of life and the afterlife, he continued, though his physical self collapsed under death's heavy hand.

In Twain's pain economy, death is a closing of accounts. It is neat and precise, an absolute. In his accountant's role, Twain cherished death, with its measurable value and its ability to help set accounts straight. "Life was not a valuable gift, but death was," writes Satan in "Letters from the Earth."

Life was a fever-dream made up of joys embittered by sorrows, pleasure poisoned by pain; a dream that was a nightmare-confusion of spasmodic and fleeting delights, ecstasies, exultations, happinesses, interspersed with long-drawn miseries, griefs, perils, horrors, disappointments, defeats, humiliations and despairs—the heaviest curse devisable by divine ingenuity; but death was sweet, death was gentle, death was kind, death healed the bruised spirit and the broken heart, and gave them rest and forgetfulness; death was man's best friend, his only friend; when man could endure life no longer, death came, and set him free. (*BA* 251)

Death leaves the pains of earth on earth. It prevents the bleeding over of imbalance into eternity.

The pain economy is contained within a mortal text. The exchange of pain is bodily, experiential. Whatever may or may not exist beyond the text is irrelevant. "Masochism," writes Cowan, "is more concerned with death than with resurrection; it finds deliverance and redemption *in* mortification and mortality, not only afterwards" (27). Death is the logical conclusion to the relationship between abuser and abused. It is the ending promised in the Garden of Eden by God as the ultimate threat, but when it comes, in Twain's version of the story, there is some confusion about whether it is a pain or pleasure. Thinking that her murdered son, Abel, is only

sleeping, healing from his wounds, Eve cries out her longing for and admiration of death. "Poor child," Satan writes, "some day you may know what a pathetic truth you have spoken; some day you may say, out of a broken heart, 'Come to me, oh, Death, the compassionate! steep me in thy merciful oblivion, oh refuge of the sorrowful, friend of the forsaken and the desolate!'" (*BA* 65). One last time, Twain transforms pain into a gift of the greatest value.

For the human sufferer, death is both the ultimate punishment and the ultimate triumph. Cowan's words bear repeating: "The antidote to humiliation is not pride, or a reassertion of one's self-respect or virtues or positive qualities. It is humility" (65-66). The ultimate power over pain always lies with the masochist. Pain cannot reach beyond life. Twain knew this. Even as he mourned over the death of his darling daughter, Susy, Twain juggled the pain of her loss with the triumph of her passing: "Oh, I wish I could see her, and caress the unconscious face & kiss the unresponding lips—but I would not bring her back—no, not for the riches of a thousand worlds. She has found the richest gift that this world can offer; I would not rob her of it" (*LL* 322). In death, Susy closed her accounts, exiting with the wealth of her suffering, her honor, and her self intact. The world of illogical suffering that stirred her to ask, "What is it all for?" could follow her no further. As Bataille puts it, "If a human being expires, the thing that expires is not the answer to a question, it is the question itself" (79). Twain was content to let this oblivious death stand as the ending to his story.

“Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell,” says Walter Benjamin. “He has borrowed his authority from death” (94). Benjamin describes a dying man, reliving the story of his life, as a man meeting himself unawares. This man is Twain—author, masochist, humorist—going back over the pain accounts, finding his own story written in numbers and hanging precariously in the balance.

Conclusion

The one thing Mark Twain could be sure about was that the world was not logical, nor was it fair. The inscrutability of existence became his project. Twain wrangled nonsense and its resulting pain into his writing, bringing his readers into close contact with the overwhelming chaos of the universe and teaching them to profit from it. As Tom Quirk puts it, Twain became proficient at “domesticating imponderables and humanizing the incomprehensible” (*MTHN* 258). Twain was ultimately rather attached to the unpredictability of a nonsense world. “[O]ur best-built certainties are but sand-houses and subject to damage from any wind of doubt that blows,” writes Twain in “The Great Dark” (319). There are no exceptions. Twain dwelt comfortably in the sand-houses; like the monk crouching over his mandala, Twain sculpted each new residence with the assurance that it would be blown away by his doubts.

Traditionally, Twain is considered to be one of the great American realists, and yet this study troubles that picture somewhat. I hardly claim that Twain is a proper romantic—yes, his work demonstrates the supremacy of the imagination as Creator, and he reads the text of the natural world as a kind of key to the divine mind, but he does so without any kind of elevation of the soul. Twain’s insistence on a measurable morality and his focused inquiry into the regulation (or disorder)

evidenced in “real life” speak to his realist tendencies, but his relationship to reality was complicated to say the least. Often, his writing concerns itself with faithfully representing reality in its minutest detail, but he questions the authority of the “reality” text as he does so. Twain’s brand of realism is one that not only writes fiction that attempts to capture reality but delivers the message that reality itself *is* a fiction. There is no hope of plausible literature, since reality itself is implausible.

Perhaps Twain’s humorous impulses are the source of this unstable relationship with reality. “Jokes tear holes in our usual predictions about the empirical world,” writes Simon Critchley (*On Humour* 1). It is a violent image, implying a strong energy in the joke itself, one that can create pain (and transform it instantly into pleasure). Critchley goes on: “The comic world is not simply ‘die verkehrte Welt,’ the inverted or upside-down world of philosophy, but rather the world with its causal chains broken, its social practices turned inside out, and common sense rationality left in tatters” (1). Whether he is being funny or not, Twain always writes from this humorous position—intent on breaking the chains, alienating the familiar and familiarizing the absurd, practicing what Critchley calls a “*surrealization* of the real” (10). His humorous (and his non-humorous) writing depends on discomfort, irrational and unjust behavior, and incongruity.

The rational, intellectual impulse is to try to resolve discrepancies and to argue down irrational thought, but Twain lets these things stand, using our discomfort to draw us into his exchange. “What bothers Western thinkers about the idea of enjoying incongruity, I think,” says Morreall, “is that such enjoyment seems

perverse, given the supreme value they place on rational understanding” (“Rejection” 249). Twain was not wholly comfortable with the thought either—he wrestled with imbalance and complained loudly about the illogical consequences of being alive—but he did not want to be comfortable. He forced himself to dwell in the irrational and the incongruous *because* it pained him, and pain was capital.

But what choice did he really have? The nonsense joke, says Freud, “consists in the introduction of something foolish, nonsensical, whose underlying meaning is the illustration, the demonstration, of something else foolish and nonsensical” (48). For Twain, however, the entire world is caught in this cycle of irrationality, his jokes only draw our attention to it. We must laugh at this pain-ridden reality, profit from it, or despair. Humor is a vital part of the pain economy for Twain because it makes use of the world’s incongruities and its pain. It is one of the primary tools for converting pain from a raw material into a currency. Without humor, Twain would have been left mining his own pain compulsively and endlessly, but he would be utterly unable to spend his glittering lode of fool’s gold.

Twain’s attraction to pain, incongruity, and inconsistency lies at the heart of his writing. He pushed himself to bring the full range of human experience into his mind. “I never saw a man with so much variety of feeling as papa has,” Susy wrote of her father (Twain, *A1* 160). He was free to take up both sides of the argument, to follow the nonsensical trails as long as it suited his temperament. Fulton sees Twain’s tendency towards duplicity of mind as a boon, “Where one sees confusion, another sees dialogue. The very point of dialogue, its *raison d’être*, is the exploration

of truth's relativity" (160). That life breaks its forms *is* the meaning of Twain's texts—if all were well and orderly, Twain would have nothing to write about.

Writing within the pain economy, Twain circles around suffering and disorder. His engagement with pain is not a symptom of depression, however. Twain allows pain to hold intrinsic value—it becomes capital, the only orderly and consistent feature of the known world. Like a proper masochist, Twain develops “an attitude which moves toward a dedication to suffering . . . which recognizes the value and meaning in that suffering” (Cowan 24). Whereas both humor and reality highlight incongruity and chaos, pain is steady and consistent. In the fiction that Twain elects, pain is the anchor.

Twain was a conscientious writer. He did not waste the capital he had found in pain. “[T]o him there was something ugly in waste, a thing often deplorable in nature,” writes Clara (Clemens 269). Twain's life was laden with pain, coming and going with tragedy, ailments, self-doubt, humiliation, etc. The pain economy was not always kind to the author, but it did its work. Twain's writings pore over the pain accounts, recording imbalance, marking credits and debits, raging at injustice and stealing guilty pleasures where he can. He was driven, as the Old Man says, “to secure peace of mind, spiritual comfort, for HIMSELF” (WM 741). Despite growing frustration and disbelief in rationality, says Quirk, Twain held out for improvement (*MTHN* 244). His writing, whether merely drawing attention to the pain imbalance or trying to correct it, is an optimistic move.

Twain's work was not without its reward. In the foreword to their anthology, *When Humour Becomes Painful*, Felicity Lunn and Heike Munder write,

We perceive the comic as precisely that which briefly annuls the order of things and allows us to experience a momentary liberating blow. Humour and art share much in common in enabling access to a world of freedom and intuition. Both find absolute value alien. Both ignore all barriers, permit contradictions and constitute an experimental spece where human concerns are introduced to us in all their relativities, with one's own failure always in view. (11)

Twain invites us to share in the pleasure of the masochist, accessible only through pain and imbalanced relationships, available only if we are willing to invest.

And perhaps this is where this study will prove most useful: in explaining how it is that we are drawn into Twain's writing, both in amusement and then in the recognition that we are out of balance and deserving of punishment. Twain brings us all into the uncomfortable position of asking if there is a "best" way, a true balance. He asks us to make a choice about which version of reality we have chosen to participate in and what responsibilities we have therefore taken upon ourselves. Unable to resist the dynamic exchange of an imbalanced world, Twain is drawn into the scene of pain imbalance. If we are to get anything out of his work, we must enter the pain economy along with him. Let us do so with our eyes open.

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